

# STAR WARS CELEBRATION

## AHSOKA! NEW MOVIES! REY RETURNS!

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REVIEWS

THE SM MAGAZINE

### GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3

Gunn's a-holes  
face the music

**'To end it not  
with a whimper,  
but a bang,  
has been my greatest  
ambition'**  
**Harrison Ford**

### SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

The web-tacular  
super-sequel  
swings in

### THE LITTLE MERMAID

A deep dive into  
the Disney remake

### TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS

Robots in the 90s

**EXCLUSIVE!**

**HARRISON FORD** IS BACK FOR ONE LAST CRUSADE IN...

# INDIANA JONES

AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY

FUTURE

**ARI ASTER** THE BOOGEYMAN **JENNA ORTEGA** **MICHAEL J. FOX**  
**SIGOURNEY WEAVER** **DARIO ARGENTO** **PIXAR'S ELEMENTAL**





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# Welcome to

## TOTAL FILM THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE



I had a VHS of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as a kid and my brother and I watched and rewatched it until it was snowy and no amount of 'tracking' could fix the baggy tape. Indiana Jones was our absolute hero and remains so to this day. Jones represents the ultimate escape. So it's a pleasure to put Indy's final adventure on the cover and delve into a treasure trove of insight into the crafting of a movie worthy of the iconic actor and character in *Dial of Destiny*. If you're jones-ing for other dopamine hits we've got you covered with *Star Wars*, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Transformers*, Sigourney Weaver, the unique mind of Ari Aster... Honestly, this issue is a treasure trove that Dr J himself would have his eye on – just be assured that your head won't melt if you open it and look inside.

As Harrison Ford bows out, we welcome fresh blood in on the TF team – our new online entertainment editor, Emily Murray. She joins a hard-working, passionate team who live and breathe movies, and I don't ever have to, ahem, crack the whip. Welcome to the family, Emily!



## Enjoy the issue!

JANE CROWTHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
@TOTALFILM\_JANE

## CALL SHEET

THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS



DEPUTY EDITOR

MATT MAYTUM  
@MATTMAYTUM

Interviewing Harrison Ford became even more nerve-shredding when he called at short notice while I was at a train station. A rare movie star who calls without a PR person patching him through.



NEWS EDITOR

JORDAN FARLEY  
@JORDANFARLEY

Had a blast at *Star Wars* Celebration in London. You can read about everything I saw on p7, but for now here were my three favourite costumes: 1) Bad Lip Reading Yoda 2) Darth Jar Jar 3) George Lucas



ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

EMILY GARBUTT  
@EMILYLGARBUTT

Nicholas Hoult talked me through all the different bugs he ate in *Renfield* during our chat for the *Inside Total Film* podcast. You can buy them on Amazon, apparently.



REVIEWS EDITOR

MATTHEW LEYLAND  
@TOTALFILM

Looking forward to Samara Weaving's big fight scenes in *Azrael*. There will be mud, she says – in fact, it could be messier than *Ready or Not*: 'It'll give that look a run for its money, yeah!'



EDITOR AT LARGE

JAMIE GRAHAM  
@JAMIE\_GRAHAM9

Always a pleasure to talk to maestro Dario Argento. One bump: I asked about directing *Inferno* with hepatitis and he thought I was suggesting he made the whole film under hypnosis.



ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

FAY WATSON  
@FAYANAWATSON

Chris Pratt told me his unconventional method for nailing the Super Mario voice – going barefoot! 'I always take my shoes off,' he explained, adding how he finds it 'grounding'. Mamma mia!



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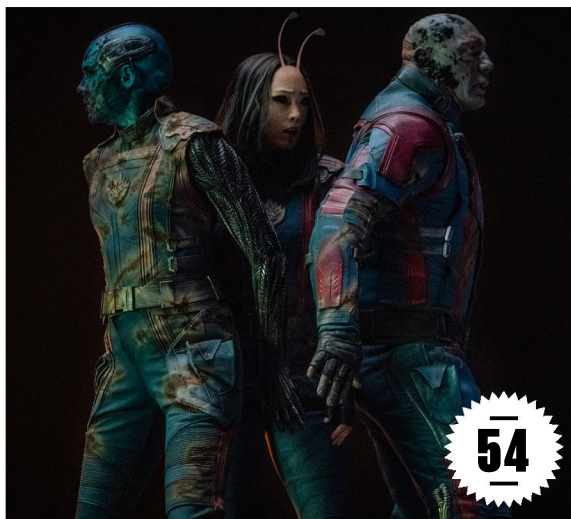
SCAN TO GET  
OUR WEEKLY  
NEWSLETTER







**'I ALWAYS WANTED TO  
SEE A COMPLETION  
OF THE CHARACTER'**



OSNEY; LUCASFILM; MARK SELIGER; MARVEL STUDIOS; SONY

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EDITED BY  
JORDAN FARLEY  
@JORDANFARLEY



# TEASERS

## GALAXY FEST

**STAR WARS CELEBRATION** *Teasers* was on the ground at Lucas Con 2023 for the biggest announcements from a galaxy far, far away...

### THREE NEW MOVIES

Despite thriving on streaming, *Star Wars* is experiencing a fallow period on the big screen. All that is set to change with three freshly announced movies delving into the past, present and future of a new 'mythological timeline'.

First up (chronologically, anyway): James Mangold will direct a movie exploring the 'dawn of the Jedi'. Set 25,000 years before the original trilogy it will 'tell the tale of the first Jedi to wield the Force', according to Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy.

For Mangold the idea was to resurrect a long-dormant genre, and give it a *Star Wars* twist. 'I thought about the biblical epic, like a *Ten Commandments*,' Mangold said. 'Where did the Force come from? When did we discover it? When did we know how to use it?'

Another new film will 'expand on our present', said Kennedy. Dave Filoni is directing a live-action feature that will 'bring together many of the threads of our series' and portray the 'escalating war between the Imperial remnants, and the fledgling New

Republic'. In other words, expect a cinematic – and potentially conclusive – collision of shows like *The Mandalorian* and *Ahsoka*.

Finally, Daisy Ridley's Jedi Master Rey will return to lead the new Jedi Order. Set 15 years after the events of the sequel trilogy, the Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy-directed film will see Rey turn teacher. 'I'm attracted to the idea of immersing myself in a Jedi Academy with a powerful Jedi Master,' said Obaid-Chinoy (*Ms. Marvel*). Steven Knight is currently on scripting ➡



➤ duties. The past, present and future of *Star Wars* look very bright indeed.

## AHSOKA

Releasing in August, this Rosario Dawson-fronted Disney+ series looks every bit a live-action continuation of animated shows *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*. Casting reveals included Mary Elizabeth Winstead as General Hera Syndulla, the return of David Tennant as droid Huyang, Ray Stevenson and Ivanna Sakhno as orange lightsaber-wielding antagonists Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati, and Lars Mikkelsen as Grand Admiral Thrawn, reprising his *Rebels* voice role in live action.

A 'remixed' version of the trailer played exclusively for the panel audience, featuring a glimpse of Thrawn's red-eyed, blue-skinned face, shots of Natasha Liu Bordizzo's Sabine Wren igniting a lightsaber and skidding on a speeder bike *Akira*-style, and a very close encounter with the whale-like Purril.

## THE ACOLYTE

The first live-action project set in the High Republic era, *The Acolyte* is 'Frozen meets *Kill Bill*' and a story 'from the perspective of the villains', according to creator Leslye Headland (*Russian Doll*). Promising 'lots of Jedi', the fact that the show is taking place at a time when there is no actual 'war' doesn't mean it will be devoid of conflict. 'I went back to George [Lucas]' inspirations of martial-arts films by Kurosawa, wuxia films, samurai films... That became the war for us – the spiritual war,' Headland said.

Star Amanda Stenberg was on hand (in Padmé cosplay!), as was *Squid Game*'s Lee Jung-jae, who plays a Jedi Master seen schooling Younglings in the Celebration-exclusive trailer. That tease, featuring a hand-to-hand encounter between Stenberg's masked ninja and Carrie-Anne Moss' robed Jedi ends with a revealing line: 'This isn't about good or bad, it's about power, and who is allowed to use it.' Consider us freshly converted acolytes.

**'The animation community is going through a global renaissance right now, and some of the best filmmaking, period, is happening in the medium'**  
JAMES WAUGH

## SKELETON CREW

Co-created by MCU *Spider-Man* director Jon Watts, *Skeleton Crew* is inspired by Amblin classics like *The Goonies*. 'Watts really got the tone,' said Kennedy, one of Amblin's co-founders. 'Even though kids were in [Amblin] movies, they weren't necessarily just kids' films. That's very much how we've approached this show.'

After announcing a knockout line-up of directors – Watts, David Lowery, the Daniels, Jake Schreier, Bryce Dallas Howard and Lee Isaac Chung – Jude Law revealed he's been in preparation for a *Star Wars* role since he was six years old, 'when this galaxy gripped me, blew my mind'. Ravi Cabot-Conyers, Robert Timothy Smith, Kyriana Kratter and (the absent) Ryan Kiera Armstrong are the pre-teen members of the eponymous crew who take a spaceship for a joy ride and find themselves in a galaxy of trouble. An exclusive Celebration trailer revealed that Kerry Condon is part of the cast as a concerned parent and that Law is playing a Jedi who helps the Crew out of a tight spot. Don't judge them by their size...

## STAR WARS: VISIONS VOLUME 2

The second season of animated anthology series *Visions* is going global. Aardman claymation short *I Am Your Mother* (which played in full at the end of the panel) was described as 'a love letter to all the mothers' by director Magdalena Osinska, who teased that 'our film is centred around a slightly absurd British tradition: sports day' and will feature an *Episode I*-style race hosted by actual Wedge Antilles, Denis Lawson.

Cartoon Saloon co-founder Paul Young directs *Screecher's Reach*, the studio's first science-fiction tale. 'We're doing an Irish ghost story with a twist,' Young said. There was also *Journey to the Dark Head* from Studio Mir, which will feature 'very cool lightsaber action' according to director Hyeon Geun Park. And *The Bandits of Golak* from Indian studio 88 Pictures was described as 'Indiana Jones meets *Sholay*' by director Milind Shinde, and features an Indian twist on the Inquisitors.

During the panel, producer James Waugh noted the mission of *Visions*: 'Let's see other cultural perspectives on *Star Wars*. I really think the animation community is going through a global renaissance right now, and some of the best filmmaking, period, is happening in the medium.' Hard to argue with that. **JORDAN FARLEY**

Rosario Dawson will star in new Disney+ series *Ahsoka*



Jude Law, Ravi Cabot-Conyers, Robert Timothy Smith and Kyriana Kratter lead the cast of *Skeleton Crew*







Ray Stevenson plays antagonist Baylan Skoll in *Ahsoka*



*Visions Volume 2* includes this Aardman short, *I Am Your Mother*



*The Acolyte's* Amanda Stenberg in cosplay at the Celebration



Kathleen Kennedy had plenty of good news for *Star Wars* fans

DISNEY/LUCASFILM



# HOT RIGHT NOW

**JENNA ORTEGA**  
IS READY FOR SHOWTIME...

**I** don't get scared very easily,' said Jenna Ortega on her *Saturday Night Live* gig. Good thing, because she is tackling roles that might leave other actors petrified. After following Christina Ricci in Tim Burton's Netflix series *Wednesday*, Ortega is now rumoured to be – sort of – following in Winona Ryder's boot-steps for Burton's long-wanted *Beetlejuice* follow-up.

According to the trades, Ortega may play the daughter of Ryder's Lydia Deetz, the 'strange and unusual' goth girl to Michael Keaton's boggle-eyed bio-exorcist. You think she's qualified? Affirmative: the casting couldn't be more perfect than, well, Ortega's emphatic ownership of *Wednesday Addams*, a gone-viral hit three decades after Ricci wrote the rulebook on dead-eyed insouciance.

For Ortega, the rumours confirm that she's practically a Ryder-grade Gen-Z icon already. Raised in California, Ortega decided to act after seeing Dakota Fanning in *Man on Fire* ('I want to be the Puerto Rican version of this girl,' she recalls thinking). She then put in commercial (Colgate) and MCU (*Iron Man 3*) time before TV gigs such as *Jane the Virgin* and Disney's *Stuck in the Middle*, where she broke fourth walls with a breezy command of the screen.

Along the way, Ortega sloughed off any Disney-kid restraints. After a creepy *Insidious: Chapter 2* appearance ('Who's the lady?') and a co-lead in *The Babysitter: Killer Queen*, horror became her self-declared 'second home'. In 2022, she survived *Scream*, died early in Foo Fighters shocker *Studio 666* and took a bullet in *X*. Latterly, she plunged

the knife – right through the throat, with a twist – in *Scream VI*.

She's diversified, too. Alongside Netflix comedy *Yes Day*, Ortega brought nuanced form to school shooting drama *The Fallout*. She'll extend that range further in the thriller *Finestkind* and romcom *Winter Spring Summer or Fall*, while roles alongside Barry Keoghan (untitled the Weeknd and Trey Edward Shults project) and Martin Freeman (*Miller's Girl*) are also incoming. As for that mooted big-screen Burton job, she knows expectations are huge: 'I feel like *Beetlejuice* is a [horror] staple,' she said. With Ortega upfront, the sequel might just make fans' millennia. **KEVIN HARLEY**

**BEETLEJUICE 2 IS IN PRE-PRODUCTION.  
OTHERS TBC.**





Getting the hump: the canine cast of *Strays*

EXCLUSIVE

## TALKING DIRTY

**STRAYS** A mutt voiced by Will Ferrell goes on a huge adventure in an R-rated comedy with heart...

**H**omeward Bound: *The Incredible Journey*, *The Secret Life of Pets*, *Cats & Dogs*... When it comes to talking-dog movies, these are just the tip of the family-fodder iceberg. But you'd best not take the kiddies to see the live-action *Strays*, in which Reggie, a lost Border terrier voiced by Will Ferrell, teams up with a pack of mangy mutts (Jamie Foxx, Isla Fisher, Randall Park) to find his way back to owner Doug (Will Forte).

'It's certainly not appropriate for those audiences,' chuckles director Josh Greenbaum, here making his follow-up to narrative feature debut *Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar*. 'But they were an inspiration. Dan [Perrault, writer] felt we had reached a saturation level in the talking-animal market. It's usually when you reach that level that the alarm bells go off for satire.'

Other inspirations for *Strays* – which is, it should be noted, produced by pedigree chums Christopher Miller and Phil Lord – include such movies as *Ted*, *Sausage Party* and *The Happytime Murders*. You know, those adult comedies in which expletives burst from normally

cutesy protagonists (animals, puppets, etc.) who also likely indulge in sex, drugs and, in the case of *Team America: World Police*, golden showers. In *Strays*, Reggie and his new pack are making their way home to take revenge on nasty Doug ('I'm going to bite his dick off!'), and the red-band trailer features gnome humping, magic-mushroom tripping and enough F-bombs to make *South Park*'s Cartman blush.

'But the reason I fell in love with it goes far beyond that,' promises Greenbaum. 'I was surprised by the level of heart and complexity, and it actually says something about the world.' Which is? 'This idea of toxic,

unhealthy relationships. Reggie is in a very unhealthy, one-way relationship with Doug. He doesn't realise it, like many people. And it's often our friends who open our eyes to that and pull us through it. They help you find your own sense of self-worth that you can lose sight of when you're in an unhealthy relationship.'

Enticingly, Greenbaum claims that *Strays* is 'Stand by Me in dog form'. They say you should never work with children or animals, so if Rob Reiner coaxed phenomenal performances out of four kids, how did Greenbaum find directing a quartet of hounds?

'Very tough,' he laughs. 'Trainers can have a dog walk into a room, turn around, pick up a ball, jump on a table and bark – you can get that eight times out of 10. The problem is having a second dog walk in on this mark at this moment, and a third dog stay seated in the corner, and a fourth bark at this moment. Now you're asking for trouble. But we got there!' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**'I was surprised by the level of heart and complexity. [Strays] says something about the world'**  
**JOSH GREENBAUM**

**STRAYS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 JUNE.**





[laughs] I think so. Is this real? Are you in a mask of some sort? No? Well, I guess I'm talking to you, then.

Yeah. I'm surprised I have an 'on' switch! I'm off all the time! [Laughs] But they call 'action' and I'm on, I guess. I pull it out the bag. The show must go on!

Yeah. I'm the luckiest punk alive. My 10-year-old self would be like, 'Wow!' When I was that age I thought it would be amazing to do acting as a job. And now I'm in the company of my heroes. It's wild.

You don't have to fight. I don't condone fighting. Let's be pacifists about this. I love on-screen fighting because you don't get hurt and you look really cool.

Oh, I'd have to say *Scream*. Drew Barrymore's scene is iconic. I like *Halloween* too. All the older horror films. They're easier to watch because the effects aren't so incredible and the jump scares feel a little sloppy now. I watched *Barbarian* recently and got sooo stressed. It's a *lot*.

Mould. I have a weird phobia. I felt sick watching *The Last of Us*. With *Chevalier*, the most terrifying thing was the singing. I worked with a very patient, kind singing coach called Michael L. Roberts. It's not me singing in the film – it's a professional Italian opera singer – but I had to sing on top of her voice in front of the whole cast and crew. There were actual opera singers in the audience. I hadn't had that feeling since I first started acting, like real nerves. I just had to flip my 'on' switch. And after I finished [the take] I fell to the ground.

FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS.  
FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.



IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH...  
**SAMARA WEAVING**

Both. I'll go into a weird, manic mood where I just want to rush everything, tick everything off. But then if it's raining, or I'm sleepy, and I have to do things I can't be bothered with, I'll drag everything out. I think that's normal, though. I'm only human, you guys!

On film, a few times: *The Babysitter*, *Ready or Not...* There's been a lot of devil themes. [Laughs] Once it's midnight, sure! Am I drawn to darker roles? It depends on the character, the script, the filmmakers... I like to do a bit of everything. The last period drama I'd done was *Picnic*



Weaving in *Chevalier* with co-stars Kelvin Harrison Jr. and Alex Fitzalan

Shy kid. Put in drama school. Great fam. Soap opera. Moved to LA. Got real lucky... Here we are. The next chapter? I don't know. I used to have chapter headings in my mind, but I found I was always wrong, and there was always something different or better, usually, than what I'd planned. So I've kind of thrown goals out of the window, because I think I've achieved what I want to do, and if this is it, then I'm so happy. Everything else is just frosting.

Tea. I'm obsessed with Yorkshire Tea's Biscuit Brew. I put a big chunk of almond milk in it. I've got one right here [raises cup].

Chickens. Definitely not elephants. Not at all.

Who am I really? Just an awkward girl, you know? Just a drama geek. I was drama captain and I'm still that way. I think all actors kind of are. They can doll us up, put us in a sexy room with one another, but we're all just still drama geeks at school. As for before, I guess that in my early 20s I was way more afraid of everything... I'm less of a scaredy-cat these days.

That's from *Guns Akimbo*! And it's true. Don't. Bring another gun, I guess. Actually, you know what? Don't bring guns. Just bring another spork, make it a spork fight. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

**CHEVALIER** OPENS IN  
CINEMAS ON 9 JUNE.



Are Mrs. Haverhill and Narvel heading up the garden path in more ways than one?

EXCLUSIVE

## GARDEN STATE

**MASTER GARDENER** Paul Schrader's latest sees a neo-Nazi turn his back on the hate...

Usually, I start with an occupational metaphor, some occupation, that has a richness to it,' says writer-director Paul Schrader. 'Whether it be a taxi driver or poker player, something that is more complex than it looks on the surface.' In the case of his latest film, *Master Gardener*, Joel Edgerton plays Narvel Roth, a horticulturalist with a dark past working for wealthy estate owner Mrs. Haverhill (Sigourney Weaver).

'Gardening can be many things to many different people,' explains Schrader. 'A right-winger can say, "We've cut out the weeds," and the left-wingers say, "We would make the world bloom."' Suffice it to say, Narvel is no Monty Don, but a former neo-Nazi who turns his back on his hateful ideology. Certainly, he dovetails with Ethan Hawke's priest in Schrader's Oscar-nominated *First Reformed*, Oscar Isaac's gambler in *The Card Counter* or even Robert De Niro's Vietnam veteran in the Schrader-scripted *Taxi Driver* – troubled men running from their demons.

Schrader, 76, sees *Master Gardener* as a 'fable of our times' rather than something to be taken literally. 'It's a hypothetical that this film imagines. I don't know whether that's even possible [for someone like Narvel to reform].

Now, we do have a few examples of people who have converted, who have become a St. Paul – who went from persecuting to proselytising... but it's a very rare thing. Usually these people die the way they live, and then they breed children just like themselves.'

Originally, Schrader wanted Glenn Close for Mrs. Haverhill. 'Glenn would always say, "When are you going to write a role for me?" So I wrote a role for Glenn. And then she turned me down!' Luckily the 'funny, witty and smart' Weaver was on hand to join Edgerton, alongside *Black Adam*'s Quintessa Swindell, who plays Haverhill's great-niece. After working with these fine actors, and despite a period of ill-health coinciding with *Master Gardener*'s Venice premiere, Schrader's now brewing another movie. 'I would like to do something about female liberation and sexuality in the contemporary moment,' he says. If he can just find that perfect occupation...

**JAMES MOTTRAM**

**MASTER GARDENER**  
OPENS IN CINEMAS  
ON 26 MAY.



### Joel Edgerton

**How did feel when Paul Schrader came calling?**

It was a real honour; I felt incredibly flattered. I was nervous about it. But I was also aware, because of *First Reformed*, I wasn't also catching him too late. It wasn't like his best work was behind him.

**What were your thoughts about the script?**

Paul's all about opposites. He finds two extremely opposite things, and then he wants to see what happens when they collide together. Or when a person's trying to move towards peace, and they get pulled back to violence. That's a constant theme of his. I liked the fact that you could play a character that has extreme violence in their past and within them, they could also be seeking to live a gentler life.

**Narvel's covered in neo-Nazi tattoos.**

**How did you react to wearing those?**

Even though I only had them on for a few days, it makes you think about what it would take for you to be that bold, in your ideology, to completely cover yourself in that kind of statement. Having tattoos like that is like handing your brain to somebody else or giving someone the password to your phone. You're going, 'Know all of me, this is my stance' – a particularly aggressive one.

**JAMES MOTTRAM**





EXCLUSIVE

# NATURAL SELECTION

**ELEMENTAL** Opposites attract in Pixar's ambitious big-city romcom.

In *Elemental*, fire, water, earth and air folk reside semi-harmoniously in the magnificent metropolis of Element City. It's against this dazzling backdrop that sparks fly between hot-headed young woman Ember (Leah Lewis) and go-with-the-flow guy Wade (Mamoudou Athie). Directed by Peter Sohn (*The Good Dinosaur*, and the voice of Sox in *Lightyear*), it's Pixar's first original film to hit cinemas since the pandemic.

## 1. FAMILY FIRST

*Elemental* is a story ripped from reality for Sohn – both he and Ember are second-generation immigrants whose parents opened up grocery stores upon arriving in their new home cities. The Lumen family business, The Fireplace, is Ember's to inherit from her ailing father, Bernie (Ronnie Del Carmen), as long as she can keep her temper in check. Even the film's fire-and-water odd couple were inspired by Sohn's own life. 'That was based off of me marrying someone who was half American, half Italian. My grandmother's dying words were literally: "Marry Korean!"' Sohn says. 'It's not autobiography, but these things become North Stars that you use as a guide.'

## 2. PARADISE CITY

'Basically, it's like doing four movies in one,' chuckles production designer Don Shank, the man tasked with developing the visual identity of a city tailored to the unique needs of its four elemental cultures. 'We have to invent a history, and make something that has a specificity to it.' Water-based infrastructure dominates because Element City was founded by H2O-riginals. 'We wanted something that would be really tough for our fire characters to make a new life,' says Sohn. 'A city that has waterfalls everywhere, and fountains – that makes it more uncomfortable, because they could be doused.'

01



02



03

## 3. WET WORK

On the day that she finally has the chance to prove herself ready to take over The Fireplace, Ember's fiery temperament gets the better of her, resulting in by-the-book city inspector Wade finding cause to shut down the shop. A transparently emotional sort with a habit of turning on the waterworks at a moment's notice (a trait inherited from his mother, voiced by Catherine O'Hara), Wade underwent significant visual development. 'We realised early on that if water was too jiggly, it felt like jello,' says directing animator Gwendolyn Enderoglu. 'The style we tried to go for was a 70/30 [split] of real and cartoony.'





04

#### 4. BUTTERFLY EFFECT

'We knew it was going to be hard. We didn't know it was going to be as hard as it was,' says producer Denise Ream of a project that tested the limits of Pixar's technical teams. The key challenge was the fact that Ember isn't on fire, she is fire, and the same goes for all the elements, requiring unprecedented collaboration between the animation and effects departments. 'We had character-based effects in every single shot. It required a different pipeline,' Ream notes. The numbers speak for themselves: whereas *Finding Nemo* utilised 923 computer cores to render its state-of-the-art visuals, and *Toy Story* a mere 294, *Elemental* had over 151,000.



05

#### 5. GOOD SPORTS

How does one have fun in Element City? You watch Air Ball, of course. It's during the play-off game that Ember and Wade confront the latter's Air Ball-loving boss, Gale (Wendi McLendon-Covey), in an effort to convince her to scrap the citations that could close The Fireplace down for good. Like almost every aspect of the film, the cyclone-shaped stadium was the product of months of meticulous visual and story development. But that doesn't mean Pixar is above playground humour. 'There are all these fart jokes,' chuckles Sohn. 'It's the Windbreakers versus the Cropdusters!'

#### 6. DOWN TO EARTH

Though more supporting players, there are several friendly earth elementals to meet, including young Clod (Mason Wertheimer), who has a crush on Ember, and Fern (Joe Pera), a colleague of Wade's who is so committed to work that he's literally planted roots in his desk. The only problem was how to fit all the team's ideas into one film. 'We had versions where [wind and earth elementals] had much bigger roles,' says Sohn. 'That was a 140-minute version of the film. We could have done a whole series. But you're just trying to hold on to what Ember needs on her journey.' **JORDAN FARLEY**

06



**ELEMENTAL OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 16 JUNE.**





EXCLUSIVE

# HEARTBREAK RIDGE

**WAR PONY** Journey to a place beyond the Pine in Riley Keough and Gina Gammell's debut...

**W**hen actress Riley Keough worked on Andrea Arnold's 2016 Cannes Jury Prize winner *American Honey*, she made two friends for life: Franklin Sioux Bob and Bill Reddy. 'Frank and Bill were hired as actors in *American Honey*,' she explains. 'We met in Rapid City, and they were in a scene with me. We became really good friends and hung out. And that kind of birthed that friendship.'

Not only did it birth their friendship, but also Keough's debut feature, *War Pony*, which she co-directs with friend Gina Gammell. Both Bob and Reddy come from the indigenous Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where *War Pony* is set. Gradually, as Keough and Gammell spent time at Pine Ridge with them, the idea of a film evolved. 'It was kind of a bunch of friends sitting around hanging out in Pine Ridge going, "Let's do something". It was just kind of a slow burn,' says Keough.

That 'something' turned into the story of two Oglala Lakota males on the Reservation: the 23-year-old Bill (Jojo Bapteste Whiting) and the 12-year-old Matho (LaDainian Crazy Thunder). Both are hustlers in their own way – Bill even hits on the idea of breeding dogs – as they look to survive their impoverished

backgrounds. 'Our intention isn't to tell a dark, sad story,' says Keough. 'Our intention is to tell an honest, true story about their lives.'

Along with Gammell, Bob and Reddy are credited co-writers, their words lending the film a feeling of authenticity and spontaneity. 'We had

**'Our intention is to tell an honest, true story about their lives'**  
RILEY KEOUGH

a very rigorous rehearsal process,' adds Gammell. 'So before we were shooting, we would work on almost everything with the actors. We had an acting coach too and if there were bumps or if a line didn't quite sit right... we would rewrite in rehearsals. It was very, very tailored.'

The results speak for themselves, with *War Pony* even winning the Camera d'Or prize in Cannes, when it bowed there last year. But was Keough ever worried that, as two white women, they shouldn't be telling an indigenous story? 'There were many moments where we started going, "Oh, God. We probably shouldn't do this,"' she admits. But with the encouragement of the community around them, they put their fears to one side.

Gammell, who met Keough in LA at a rep screening of *American Psycho* in a cemetery, felt they were perfect partners on set. 'We bicker like sisters. We argue a lot. But we're also incredibly supportive and incredibly co-dependent on one another, too.' The pair are already planning a second feature, albeit away from South Dakota. 'It's definitely not gonna be in Pine Ridge,' says Gammell. 'I think that's once in a lifetime – this family that we have created on this film.'

**JAMES MOTTRAM**  
**WAR PONY IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 JUNE.**





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Irish paramilitary Michael (Colin Morgan) seeks bloody revenge

EXCLUSIVE

# THE AVENGER

**DEAD SHOT** On Guard – sibling directing duo Tom and Charles tackle an IRA revenge tale...

**I**t's a rain-soaked May morning when *Teasers* hot-foots it to Glasgow to the set of Tom and Charles Guard's new IRA thriller *Dead Shot*. All 1970s chic in a brown suede coat, Felicity Jones (*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*) is confronted in a dilapidated tenement by Aml Ameen (*Yardie*), sporting a combat jacket and brandishing a submachine gun. Time stands still, but the Guards yell 'cut'. 'Let it trigger your anger,' directs Charles, as they reset for a second take.

'We have always been intrigued by IRA films or films set within the context of the IRA. From Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* onwards,' says Charles. Reworking the original script by Ronan Bennett (*Top Boy*), the brothers shaped a story that sees Ameen's SAS sergeant Tempest gun down the pregnant wife of Colin Morgan's Irish paramilitary, Michael. When the action switches to London, Michael is out for revenge. Jones' character, meanwhile, is an IRA go-between caught in the fray.

'She's a really intriguing character to be playing... she's a courier, really,' says Jones, taking a breather between takes. 'She's on the ground in England, in London, coordinating the bombings.' Jones took inspiration from late IRA

volunteer Dolours Price – 'a reference to understand the headspace of the character' – though notes how the core focus is Michael and Tempest. 'You really root for them. They are really victims of these systems, and particularly of the malevolent patriarchal figures [behind them].'

With Mark Strong and Tom Vaughan-Lawlor cast as the shadowy 'bad fathers', as Charles puts it, it's a prominent theme. '[We wanted to explore] this idea that young men are very easily influenced by older men,' says Charles. 'And how corrosive that can be when the older men don't necessarily have the future

**'[We wanted to explore] this idea that young men are easily influenced by older men'**  
CHARLES GUARD

generation's best interests at heart. That was essentially our pitch: to look at masculinity in that way.'

A true family affair, *Dead Shot* is edited by the Guards' sibling Ted, while Jones is married to Charles. 'It just works,' she says of being directed by her husband and brother-in-law. 'It feels very organic. And we often have similar instincts.' Nonetheless, the Guards squeezed every last drop from their star. Even a simple phone-call scene. 'We ended up shooting [it] for about four hours because we were enjoying it so much,' chuckles Tom. 'It felt so moody and intense and that was Felicity making that really come alive.'

While Jones dug into her character by watching *In the Name of the Father* ('an important reference'), the Guards nodded to 1984's lesser-known *Cal*, with Helen Mirren and John Lynch, but also from real-life imagery from the period. Photos of 1970s street life all showed the same thing. 'Piles of rubbish and children with black eyes and muddy faces,' laughs Charles. It really was grim down south.

JAMES MOTTRAM

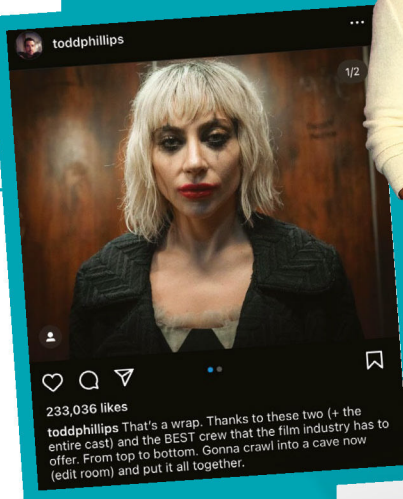
**DEAD SHOT IS ON SKY CINEMA FROM 12 MAY.**





**'THAT WAS THE WORST EXPERIENCE I'VE EVER SEEN IN A BUSINESS WHICH IS FULL OF SOME SHITTY EXPERIENCES.'**

BEN AFFLECK SAYS MAKING *JUSTICE LEAGUE* CAUSED HIM TO HANG UP THE CAPE AND COWL.



**'Lando is definitely somebody I'd like to hang out with... We're talking about it.'**

SEEMS WE MAY NOT HAVE SEEN THE LAST OF DONALD GLOVER'S SMOOTH-TALKING CALRISSIAN.

**37**

THE PERCENTAGE OF VIEWERS WHO FINISHED WATCHING THE FIRST SEASON OF *THE RINGS OF POWER*. HALF A BILLION WELL SPENT...



# SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.



**380**

THE NUMBER OF WORDS KEANU REEVES SAYS IN *JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4* - JUST 2.25 'YEAHS' AND 'MAYBE NOTS' PER MINUTE.

**'I WILL NEVER WATCH IT, AND I DON'T WANT YOU TO TELL ME ABOUT IT, EVER.'**

DAVID LYNCH DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT DENIS VILLENEUVE'S *DUNE*.



## HEATING UP

Michael Mann looks set to bring his *Heat 2* novel to the big screen, with Adam Driver in talks to play a young Neil McCauley, Robert De Niro's master thief.



## GOOD THING



## BAD THING



## LANCE REDDICK RIP

Lance Reddick has died at the age of just 60. He'll appear posthumously in next year's *John Wick* spin-off *Ballerina*.

**'BY THE END I PROBABLY, MOST DEFINITELY ABUSED MY OWN SELF IN ORDER TO GET THAT PERFORMANCE.'**

FLORENCE PUGH PUSHED HERSELF TO THE BRINK FOR *MIDSOMMAR*.



**'COME ON, KENS, NOBODY'S GONNA BEACH ANYONE OFF.'**

THE INNUENDO IS STRONG WITH *BARBIE* (MARGOT ROBBIE).





Benedetta Porcaroli plays the isolated, titular Amanda in Carolina Cavalli's debut



EXCLUSIVE

## SIGNORA BIRD

**AMANDA** A lonely woman has a late coming of age in this riveting debut.

**A**t first glance, Carolina Cavalli's directorial debut feels much like the breakout feature of another 30-something female filmmaker, Greta Gerwig: both are named after their feisty heroines, Lady Bird and Amanda; both navigate a murky coming of age; and both prod at how thorny mother-daughter relationships often mask unattended growing pains.

'I tried keeping references a bit far because I didn't have a specific voice yet,' Cavalli says of her film, which chronicles the hurdles of Amanda (Benedetta Porcaroli), a 24-year-old who tries to reignite a bond with a childhood bestie after years of struggling to maintain meaningful friendships.

'This moment in your mid-20s or early 30s, when you still haven't found your place in the world, causes a sense of displacement. And displacement is something I feel so much around me,' Cavalli says of a deeply personal project. 'Adult life is kind of an anticlimax so you want to keep your teenage self alive.'

**'Adult life is kind of an anticlimax'**  
CAROLINA CAVALLI

Amanda, a Latin name which stands for 'she who must be loved', is a fitting choice for a character desperately seeking companionship. 'The name relates to the journey of the character but, in the end, it relates to every human being's desire to be loved.

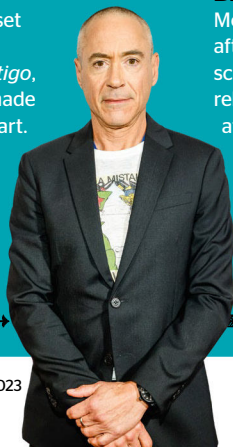
'I thought about a child's tendency of not adapting to reality but adapting reality to themselves, and stories like those of *Peter Pan* and *Pippi Longstocking*,' the director says of her character development process. 'I always wondered how they'd be when they grew up. Amanda can maybe grow up while maintaining the characteristics I admire in children.' **RAFA SALES ROSS**

**AMANDA OPENS IN CINEMAS AND STREAMS ON CURZON HOME CINEMA FROM 2 JUNE.**

## SHORT CUTS The latest happenings in movieland...

### AWAY WE'GO

Robert Downey Jr. is set to star in a remake of Hitchcock classic *Vertigo*, stepping into a role made iconic by James Stewart. Steven Knight is on script duties, so don't expect a shot-for-shot remake akin to Gus Van Sant's *Psycho*.



### BACK TO SCHOOL

More than two decades after debuting on the big screen, a *Harry Potter* reboot is in the works at streamer HBO Max, which would adapt one book per season with an all-new cast. No word on the future of *Fantastic Beasts*, though...

### FIRESTARTER

After missing out on a Best Actor Oscar, Austin Butler has found his next lead role in an adaptation of Don Winslow's crime novel *City On Fire*. The first in a potential trilogy, Butler would play Danny Ryan, a street soldier who rises through the criminal ranks over decades.



### YOU'RE WELCOME

The Rock has announced a live action remake of 2016 Disney hit *Moana* is in the works, in which he will reprise his role as Maui. Details are otherwise sparse, though many have expressed surprise about a film less than a decade old getting the remake treatment.



## NEXT BIG THING

**ABBY RYDER  
FORTSON**  
 IS LIVING HER  
 TEENAGE DREAMS

**F**ifteen year-old Abby Ryder Fortson seems wise beyond her years, something she tells *Teasers* is 'a bonus of growing up on set around a bunch of adults'. She's been acting for over a decade, and was the first incarnation of Cassie Lang in the MCU, but now is set for stardom as the lead of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.* — the long-awaited adaptation of Judy Blume's coming-of-age classic.

**When did you decide you wanted to act?**

My parents and brother are actors and used to bring me to their auditions. When I was about to turn four, I said, 'I want an audition!' So they got me with their agent, and I booked and shot my first commercial on my fourth birthday.

**Now you are a teenager, were you excited to create something about being a teenage girl?**

Yeah, these kinds of stories are just as important as other ones. Even more important sometimes because they are about finding and accepting yourself for who you are. That is something we all really need.

**Has the director, Kelly Fremon Craig, told you what made you right for this part?**

She said that as soon as I walked in for my director's session, I was Margaret. I think they saw how I related so much to the character, and I wrote them letters explaining all of the experiences that I was going through that connected so much to her and why the character meant so much to me. And it worked!

**There are many embarrassing moments for Margaret. Were there any scenes that you were dreading?**

I was seriously dreading having to kiss someone on screen. It was my first time doing that, and it was fun but awkward. So, I got my first 150 kisses in a two-hour shoot. That has to be some sort of record. Honestly, I should get a little badge.

**LEILA LATIF**

**ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET.**  
 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 19 MAY.



# BETWEEN TAKES

MARY STEENBURGEN

THE *BOOK CLUB: THE NEXT CHAPTER* STAR ON STILTON AND SPRITZERS...



## What's the first thing you do when you arrive on set?

Most of the time we're talking sort of 5.30 in the morning, so I'm still nursing a coffee at that point. Then I head into the make-up trailer. It's what sets the tone for the whole day. I really cherish those times, and the laughter, and getting to know people. When I was younger, I used to make my trailer look homely. That was many movies ago [laughs]. I still do often have photos of my family and my dog, but now I tend to take that energy and put it into what I'm going to come home to at the end of the day.

## Is it different arriving on a set when it's a sequel, like *Book Club: The Next Chapter*, and you know the cast members from the first film?

It really is, because not only did we work together, but we really adored each other, so much that we remained close for these years. They all frequently come over for dinner. Ted [Danson, husband since 1995] and I, we love to make pasta from scratch. So we'll make pasta and apple spritzers and all the things that we most recently had in Rome in Italy [where *Book Club 2* shot], and we'll make dinner for them. I'm going to a Bonnie Raitt concert very soon with Jane [Fonda]. We all hang out, so it's fun.

## Do you have any on-set superstitions?

Well, I have some superstitions that aren't necessarily to do with sets. For example, I never watch anyone that I care about walk out of sight. I turn around. If I'm saying goodbye to someone, I turn before they're out of sight. I think I learned as a child that it's bad luck to watch someone walk out of sight. [Ponders] There are a lot of ladders on set. I would never walk under one.

## Hot or cold lunch?

I love these questions! Nobody's ever asked me this. I think I prefer a hot lunch on set. I feel a little cheated if I just have a salad. I love to see: 'Ooh, what have they got today?' I don't eat a really big lunch, because it would make me



**'IT WAS JUST A REALLY GREAT GROUP OF PEOPLE. DANCING WITH KEVIN BACON WAS PRETTY AMAZING'**



With *Book Club 2* co-stars Diane Keaton, Jane Fonda and Candice Bergen

sleepy. But saying that, I have this image of being at Shepperton Studios, and going to an amazing pub nearby. I used to love to go to the pub for some lunch. Stilton, homemade bread... I love all that. I don't eat a big lunch; I conserve my energy. I remember learning that on the set of my first film [*Goin' South*, 1978]. My mentor and my director was Jack Nicholson. He could see I was chatting to every single person. He said, 'It's fine to be friendly. It's great. But just be careful with your energy, because your energy is meant to be on that screen.'

## Was it hard conserving energy on *Step Brothers*? You must have been laughing at every take...

It was hard because in the morning we would shoot the script, and in the afternoon we would improv things. I had one scene with Will Ferrell, where we're in the car. We never got through the whole scene. Either he would laugh, or I would laugh, or we would both laugh.

## Have you ever stolen anything from the set of a movie?

I've taken things from my costume, but I've never taken them without asking because I don't want to get somebody in trouble. And to be honest, the last thing I need is more stuff in life [laughs].

## What's the best wrap party you've ever been to?

I like to go to wrap parties. I like to thank the crew, and honour their work. I think the best one was actually one for a little film you probably wouldn't have seen, *End of the Line*. It's a film I produced a long time ago, in Arkansas. The reason it was so amazing is that Levon Helm, from The Band, played my husband in the film. He got The Band together and invited them to the wrap party. We danced, and we had fun. Holly Hunter was in that film, and Kevin Bacon. It was just a really great group of people. Dancing with Kevin Bacon was pretty amazing. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**BOOK CLUB: THE NEXT CHAPTER  
OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 12 MAY.**



Fox opens up about his career and health issues



## Michael J. Fox

### Why was now the right time to tell your story in this way?

With all that I've experienced in the last few years, the avenues I have with which to express my creativity – to get my feelings out – have kind of diminished in a way. But I can tell stories, and the stories I know best are my own stories.

### How did you approach this reflective period on your life and career?

Davis really attached himself to that early stuff. It started when I was a little kid and had no sense of boundaries. I would just go out and inflict myself on the world.

### Was there anything you were hesitant to reveal about the reality of living with Parkinson's?

Davis shot it so beautifully. It could have been confrontational, but it was cathartic. In order for this to be the film that it is, I had to let Davis be the filmmaker that he is.

### How did you find the balance between humour and pathos in your story?

My thing on anything is, what's funny about it? You can always find the part that's tragic in something... But it's much more rewarding to find what's universally human. And I find what's universally human is usually universally funny. **JOEL HARLEY**

EXCLUSIVE

# FANTASTIC MR. FOX

## STILL: A MICHAEL J. FOX MOVIE

An intimate portrait of the actor's life with Parkinson's.

**W**ith *Still*, director Davis Guggenheim set out not to make a Michael J. Fox documentary, but specifically a Michael J. Fox movie. 'I thought wouldn't it be great to make a documentary that feels like an 80s movie?' says Guggenheim. 'When I first had this idea, I started jotting down words. My first words were "wild ride".'

As the subject of this wild ride, Fox guides Guggenheim through his life as a child star and Hollywood sensation, through to and beyond his Parkinson's diagnosis. Building its narrative in a hybrid of interview footage, dramatisation and clip montage, the film is what Guggenheim calls a 'jambalaya' of sources. 'Narrative structure is everything to me,' the director says, illustrating Fox's life through footage of the actor in his TV and movie work (yes, including *Back to the Future*). This also incorporates sections from Fox's biographies, which the actor reads from himself. 'A lot of documentaries start with absolutely nothing, and we started with Michael's four books. We had these incredible scenes that were already beautifully written,' says Guggenheim.

The *An Inconvenient Truth* director stumbled

across Fox's story in a *New York Times* interview, while searching for a new project. He was immediately taken with the actor's outlook as he vividly described a recent fall. 'It's a heavy scene, but the way he writes it, the tone was so appealing to me,' Guggenheim says. 'Not only dramatic, but also very witty, very wise about what it means to be.'

It was important to subject and director that the film didn't shy away from the reality of Fox's condition. This includes footage of Fox being interviewed in the wake of a series of devastating falls. 'He broke his arm, he broke his hand, his face. That was very much in the background of the movie until it became in the movie,' says Guggenheim.

Yet, for its honesty, the film's tone never veers into overt, schmaltzy sentimentality. Says Guggenheim: 'The one note he ever gave me was no violence – which means no maudlin, no pitying.' **JOEL HARLEY**

**STILL: A MICHAEL J. FOX DOCUMENTARY RELEASES IN SELECT CINEMAS AND ON APPLE TV+ ON 12 MAY.**







EXCLUSIVE

## GALLOWS HUMOUR

**ON THE COUNT OF THREE** Multi-talented Jerrod Carmichael mines laughs out of chaos.

A lot has changed since Jerrod Carmichael's directorial debut premiered at Sundance in January 2021 (where it was *Total Film*'s pick for best of the festival). The comedian, who also stars in the pitch-black comedy, hosted the Golden Globes and *SNL*, filmed Yorgos Lanthimos' latest alongside Emma Stone and came out as gay in his Emmy-winning special *Rothaniel*.

Warning *Teasers* that he'll spend the entire interview pacing, he quickly gets introspective. 'I made this right before *Rothaniel*, and it's a little chaotic. Kind of how my life was then playing out. I just felt like it would speak to other people also going through some sort of crisis.' Now approaching household-name status, Carmichael has 'learned not to be so hard on myself. It's felt like a "coming out" in a lot of different ways, into a fuller expression of myself.'

As long-term fans of Carmichael can attest, he can make absolutely anything funny. *On the Count of Three* further proves this with the bone-chillingly bleak subject matter of Val (Carmichael) and his best friend Kevin (Christopher Abbott) forming a suicide pact.

Yet whether he's taking on mass shootings in the community, *Cosby* or internalised homophobia, he says, 'I don't worry about finding the humour

because, in my life, it comes in serious moments when no one is trying to tell a joke. Cinematically, that creates suspense, and my characters also laugh because they need a release from the tension, too.'

Carmichael isn't afraid to subvert what the viewer expects to be funny, and *On the Count of Three* sees Henry

**'It's a little chaotic. Kind of how my life was then playing out'**  
JERROD CARMICHAEL

Winkler, Tiffany Haddish and J.B. Smoove cast boldly against type. When *Teasers* describes Smoove as 'harrowing', Carmichael laughs. 'J.B. could handle it! And he reminded me of my father – a funny, charming man who has done a lot wrong. In those scenes, I started tearing up.'

From turning beloved comedians into nightmarish versions of his dad, to calling out racism in his awards monologue, to gambling on a suicide comedy, Carmichael's courage is perhaps his most sublime signature. He quotes his best friend and *Rothaniel* director Bo Burnham: 'He says that I have access to a lot of bravery and a willingness to really excavate myself to serve the work.'

Carmichael has been pleasantly surprised by audiences being able to 'see past the synopsis and connect to a heartfelt story'. But the Black community's love and support have moved him the most. 'Part of it came from wanting to be respected by my family, and that's been complicated. But I only want to get it being honest, and I respect the intellect of the Black community too much to condescend to it. And I now respect myself too much to do that too. I'm finally earning it by being truthful.'

**LEILA LATIF**



**ON THE COUNT OF THREE OPENS IN CINEMAS THIS JUNE.**



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Making waves: kraken Ruby  
and mermaid Chelsea (below)



EXCLUSIVE

# RELEASE THE KRAKEN

## RUBY GILLMAN, TEENAGE KRAKEN

A deep-sea adventure awaits in this animation.

**A**fter tackling dragons, swashbuckling cats and hair-raising trolls, DreamWorks is now heading under the sea to unpick the legend of the kraken. But don't expect a *Clash of the Titans*-style sea monster – Ruby Gillman, *Teenage Kraken* instead reimagines the creature as a shy teenage girl whose life of anonymity is upended after she discovers that she's destined to become a warrior kraken queen.

'This isn't a gift that was given or a curse that happened to her,' director Kirk DeMico tells *Teasers* over Zoom. 'It's who she is, it's a power that's inside her, and she has a choice to either embrace it or not.' To help her make that decision, Ruby (Lana Condor) is taught the ways of the kraken by her majestic grandmother, played by screen legend Jane Fonda.

The Oscar winner isn't the only one bringing Hollywood gravitas to the story, either, with *Hereditary*'s Toni Collette voicing Ruby's mum, Agatha. Very different from Fonda's Warrior Queen of the Seven Seas, Collette's character has given up a life under the sea to raise her family on land. The pair represent two different worlds

for Ruby, who must decide whether to stay 'hidden away' or to embrace her destiny. Although complications arise when mermaid-in-disguise Chelsea (*Schitt's Creek* star Annie Murphy) threatens to expose Ruby's secret.

A coming-of-age story may feel like familiar ground for the animation studio behind the *How to Train Your Dragon* franchise, but DeMico says they worked hard to create a film that looks distinctive from anything they've done before. 'There's a long history of anthropomorphised animals at DreamWorks,' he explains. 'This was an opportunity to really play with more curves and stretched

**'When Ruby transforms, there's something so powerful about that moment'**  
KELLY COONEY  
CILELLA

animation because of who they are as a family of sea monsters.'

DeMico, who also helmed *The Croods* for the studio, admits that it was a welcome change. 'We really played with the squash and stretch of the animation that I think a lot of animators all love but may not have had the opportunity [to do] previously,' he adds. 'You could feel their excitement when all of a sudden you're like, "Oh, does it have to be on a rig?" It's like, "Well no, because they don't have a skeleton. You could turn him into a cube, we can flatten them out."'

The malleability of the animation also allows them to embrace Ruby's transformation into the huge sea creature, according to producer Kelly Cooney Cilella. 'When she transforms into the giant kraken, there's something so powerful about that moment because she's a monster, yet she's beautiful and powerful and strong,' which, she adds, encapsulates their aim with the story perfectly:

'It's a great message that heroes come in all shapes and sizes.'

FAY WATSON

**RUBY GILLMAN, TEENAGE KRAKEN**  
OPENS IN CINEMAS  
ON 30 JUNE.





# IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Editor-at-Large **JAMIE GRAHAM** lifts the lid on film journalism.

It's often said that music conjures the most emotionally charged, pinpoint memories. Should a favourite track come on the radio, people will recall exactly where they were and what they were doing when they first heard it. But for me (and, I'd guess, many other film nuts), it's movies that most get my recollections rolling.

*Goodfellas* is a film I've seen literally dozens of times, but every time it begins with that thumping in the trunk and Henry Hill's alarmed eyes glancing in the rear-view mirror, I'm immediately transported back to the autumn of 1991, sitting in the common room of my college hall of residence and watching it with my housemates through a fog of cigarette smoke. Whenever *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* gets a fresh spin on my Blu-ray player, I can straightaway smell the popcorn and the excitement as I sit, 10 years old with mouth agape, beside my grandmother at the Star cinema in Winchester. And when Freddy Krueger welds

his razor-clawed glove during the opening credits of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, I'm once more a teenager in my best friend's bedroom, cacking myself at the thought of cycling home alone in the dark when the film is done.

## YOUTH CLUB

But there's another way that any film fan will measure their life by movies, one that's none-too-pleasant but unavoidable: we, the viewers, get older, while the characters in the films stay fixed in time, their unchanging features and unthickening torsos flagging our mortality. Last month I attended a showing of *Jaws* at my local cinema and was shocked to find that Chief Brody and his wife, Ellen, are not the old, worn couple they seemed to me when I watched *Jaws* frequently as a teenager, but instead fresh and virile. Same with Jimmy 'The Gent' Conway upon a recent revisit to the aforementioned *Goodfellas*; Robert De Niro, who plays him, was younger in 1990 than I am now, and in much better shape.

THIS MONTH...  
**MEASURING MY LIFE BY MOVIES**



## 'CINEMA CAN FREEZE TIME AND PRESERVE MOMENTS'

The Benjamin Button effect is most pronounced when I go back to watch something like *St. Elmo's Fire* or *Good Will Hunting*, only to find the protagonists, once my age or older, now look like kids. So instead of laughing at *Big* or cowering at *Friday the 13th* or punching the air at the end of *Dirty Dancing*, I sit there pondering: how did I get so old? And it's only going to get worse.

## FOREVER YOUNG

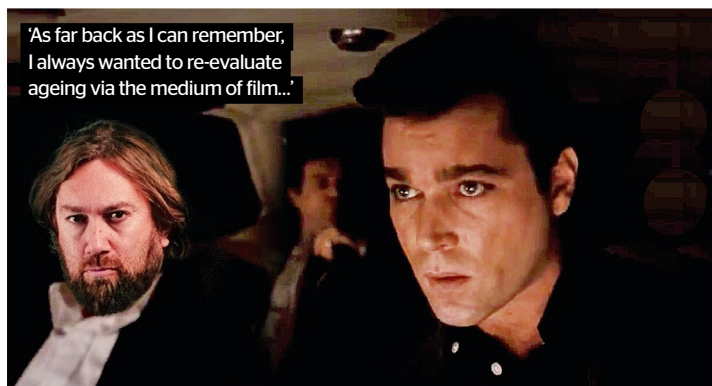
Naturally, what I'm describing is one of cinema's most potent powers, how it can freeze time and preserve moments for evermore. Many film lovers will no doubt regard the phenomenon through a lens of positivity, celebrating the fact that these talented, beautiful, charismatic actors and the beloved characters they create are gifted immortality.

Generation after generation can glory in their work, and bathe in their undimmed life force as it radiates from the screen.

But I've always been a neurotic, glass-half-empty kinda guy. Where others see everlasting life, I spy my own yawning grave, and when I watch old black-and-white movies, as much as I'm giddily in thrall of actors like Bogart, Cagney, Stanwyck, Tracy and Bacall, it always saddens me that everyone in the film is now dead. Freud said that we're all driven towards death and destruction and that 'the aim of all life is death'. But it's no aim of mine. Or, suddenly it occurs, maybe it is, and that's why I compulsively watch thousands of films and have these thoughts as I watch them: to ready myself to shuffle off this mortal coil.

It's all a bit depressing when you pause to ponder it, and I can't even dig out one of my old favourite comedies to cheer myself up – it will only make things worse. Looks like I'll be mainlining grey-pound movies from here on out. Either that or find a better moisturiser.

'As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to re-evaluate ageing via the medium of film...'



JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE... FOR MORE MISADVENTURES, FOLLOW: @JAMIE\_GRAHAM9 ON TWITTER.





EXCLUSIVE

Prisoners walk ahead of  
a Nazi tank... in a minefield

## GOLD WAR

**SISU** A Finnish gold prospector beats, bludgeons and blows up Nazis in *Rambo*-like revenge-a-thon.

**R**ecent reports noted that Keanu Reeves utters just 380 words in *John Wick: Chapter 4*. Aatami Korpi – the taciturn hero of Jalmari Helander’s gnarly World War Two action rampage *Sisu* – makes Wick look like a gasbag in comparison. ‘He actually says 11 words,’ notes Helander (*Rare Exports*, *Big Game*), with a dry Scandinavian chuckle. ‘It was a good thing to do, because it forces you to think through images.’

Actions speak far louder than words in *Sisu*. Set across the rugged plains of Lapland in the wake of the 1944 Moscow Armistice, which expelled the Nazis from Finland, it stars 64-year-old Jorma Tommila as Korpi – a grizzled and enigmatic figure ‘who has decided to leave the war behind’. After striking gold, Korpi loads up the saddlebags of his faithful steed, but soon crosses a retreating Nazi patrol who decide to claim the fortune as their own. Big mistake, as it turns out...

‘They don’t know that he’s the meanest motherfucker on the planet,’ smiles Helander. It’s a set-up directly inspired by *First Blood*. But unlike that Stallone classic, in which Vietnam War vet John Rambo unintentionally kills just one person, Korpi has Nazi blood on his hands, and every other inch of

his body, after an explosive 91 minutes.

As Helander points out, ‘You can do what the fuck you want with Nazis, and no one will feel shitty about what’s happening to those guys,’ giving the writer/director carte blanche to conceive a series of gleefully extreme kills.

Jorma Tommila as mean  
motherf\*\*ker Aatami Korpi

**‘It makes you think you’re so tough that you basically refuse to die’**  
JALMARI HELANDER

‘I didn’t have a \$100 million budget, so I knew that I had to be inventive,’ Helander says, teasing one unforgettably deranged sequence. ‘When I had the idea for how to survive underwater without oxygen I was laughing my ass off!’

The opening title card informs us that ‘sisu’ is an untranslatable Finnish word meaning ‘a white-knuckled form of courage and unimaginable determination’. It’s a word with a long history in Finland, Helander’s home country where all his features to date have been set. ‘I think it’s a cool concept to put in a film, because it’s almost like a superpower,’ Helander says. ‘But it doesn’t make you immortal. It just makes you think you’re so tough that you basically refuse to die.’

Describing Korpi as ‘my fantasy of a Finnish war hero’, Helander pushed his then 63-year-old leading man to the limit for a film shot almost entirely in the wind, rain and mud. Making *Sisu* wasn’t easy, then, but has inspired Helander to take the concept of a near-silent protagonist even further with his next film. ‘I’m thinking I might write a film that has no dialogue at all, and make a big action film without words,’ he reveals. Now that’s fighting talk. **JORDAN FARLEY**

**SISU OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 MAY.**



# THE HERO

**R**ita Moreno burst on to the scene in *West Side Story*, making history by becoming the first Latin actress to win an Oscar for her performance. She's had a long and distinguished career (*The King and I*, *Carnal Knowledge*, HBO's *Oz*), but don't expect the 91-year-old star to be announcing her retirement just yet – she's the latest addition to the *Fast & Furious* family.

## How did you get involved with *Fast X*?

I met Vin [Diesel] a number of years ago at a Hollywood do. He let me know that he was an admirer of my work and I was flattered. I stayed in touch with him. I thought of inviting him to the premiere of our new *West Side Story* and happily he said yes. We got together afterwards and had drinks. My grandson Justin, who is an enormous fan of his, collared Vin and said, 'You really should have my grandmother in the movie. She should be the kind of feisty old woman that grabs you by the nose and tells you off.' Justin, to this day, is absolutely convinced that he cast me.

## Is that what your character, Abuela Toretto, is really like in the film?

She really is those kinds of things. That's why I love doing the character – she's truly the boss' boss. But she would never do something like Justin described!

**You shot to fame in the musical *West Side Story* and then starred in the 2021 remake. Does the film hold a special place in your heart?**  
Oh my gosh, both of them for



## RITA MORENO THE LEGENDARY OSCAR WINNER ON FAST X, BRANDO AND THE MUPPETS.

very different reasons. The first one because it got me world fame. I have two awards that are very precious to me – the Golden Globe and, of course, the Oscar. Who could ask for more? I never dreamed that I would end up in that film – I tested for it along with, I imagine, every brunette and dark-eyed actor in California. And then to end up so many years later in the new version with my most favourite director... I've always loved Steven [Spielberg]. He is so versatile.

**You had a supporting role in *Singin' in the Rain*...**



All singing, all dancing: *West Side Story*, *The Night of the Following Day* with Marlon Brando, and *Fast X*.



I was there when Gene did the *Singin' in the Rain* number with a 103 [degree] fever. I showed up almost every day just to watch my musical hero. Because I was a contract player, I was allowed to visit all the sets like *Summer Stock* with Judy Garland.

## You worked with former boyfriend Marlon Brando on *The Night of the Following Day*. What was the most memorable moment from that shoot?

This was way after we had broken up. There is a scene where we have a terrible argument and I was supposed to slap him. I have real problems hitting anyone in a scene. He really gave me a talking to. He said, 'You can't fake this. You have to do it.' We get to the scene and I went for it. He slapped me back, but in such an awful way – I literally understood what people meant when they said they saw stars. It awakened all of my resentments about him and I started to attack him. It was frightening and it was all on film. The director, of course, loved it and it stayed in the movie.

## You won an Emmy for your guest role in *The Muppet Show*. How did you get that cameo?

I live in New York. Down a few blocks was the studio where *The Muppet Show* was being shot. I was a huge fan. One day I went to have lunch. And who was there? Jim Henson. I immediately went to his table and got on my knees. I said, 'I worship you and your work. I would give anything to be a voice for one of the Muppets.' And I auditioned for him. He just stared at me with this fork in mid-air. He called me up a few weeks later. I literally ran to the studio filled with joy.

ANN LEE

**FAST X OPENS IN CINEMAS  
ON 19 MAY.**

**'JIM HENSON JUST  
STARED AT ME WITH  
THIS FORK IN MID-AIR'**



A legendary cinema character gets a final outing in **Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny** as Harrison Ford prepares to hang up the fedora for good. *Total Film* meets the star and his collaborators to talk ageing heroes, and stepping back in time in more ways than one...

WORDS MATT MAYTUM

# FORD FOCUS









don't believe in magic, but a few times in my life, I've seen things,' glowers Indiana Jones in his latest adventure, *Dial of Destiny*. Magic of various kinds is embedded in the DNA of the Indiana Jones franchise. Without the alchemy of the perfect combination of character/actor, idea/execution, it's a series that so easily could've fallen by the wayside, instead of becoming an indelible movie landmark, a face carved into the Mount Rushmore of cinema history.

Created by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg for 1981's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones is in some ways inseparable from the man who has played him for more than 40 years. The reluctant heroism. The cool-under-pressure charisma. The intelligence, curiosity and resourcefulness that's led to a career littered with treasures. In his 80s heyday (in films set between 1935 and 1938), Harrison Ford's fedora-sporting archeologist took on Nazis and cults, nabbing rare McGuffins, solving puzzles and evading boulders, before returning to take on Soviet agents and aliens in 2008's *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (set in 1957). Despite stellar box office, it would take more than a fridge to protect that film from the nuclear assault mounted by critics.

A fifth instalment was soon mooted. Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012 made some form of new Indy content inevitable, although a fifth movie went through a protracted development journey – with Spielberg stepping down from directing duties and James Mangold (*Cop Land*, *Logan*, *Le Mans '66*) taking the helm, before shooting would finally begin in the summer of 2021. The first miracle, after all this time, was actually getting Ford back in the hat and jacket, bullwhip in hand, for one last outing as one of his



Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and Helena (Phoebe Waller-Bridge)

signature characters (in a career that's not exactly had a shortage of them).

'I always wanted to see a completion of the character,' Ford tells *Total Film* in April 2023, at the end of a day on set playing Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross in upcoming MCU film *Captain America: New World Order*. 'I wanted to see [Indiana Jones] at a later stage of his life, when he's beyond the youthful enthusiasm and capacity, and beset by age and [stifled by academia]. I wanted to see him engage on one more unexpected, unanticipated adventure.' Ford is now 80 years old, and was 79 during shooting; *Dial of Destiny* is (mostly) set during 1969's space race, at a time when Indy himself is around 70. And the film won't shy away from that.

'I wanted it to concern age,' Ford continues, in that unmistakable, measured drawl. 'I wanted it to confront the issues of age for a character who had always been adventurous, youthful, and capable, physically. I wanted to see the effects of age on the character.'

Mangold had worked as a producer on Ford's *The Call of the Wild* (2020); the pair had discussed other opportunities that didn't materialise. Ford, Spielberg (who remains involved as a producer) and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy approached Mangold with the proposition of directing this latest, and final, Indiana Jones adventure. 'The overwhelming sense of honour of being approached by heroes of yours was intense,' says Mangold, speaking to *TF*





## INDIANA JONES 5



### MADS MIKKELSEN

#### Introduce your character, Voller...

He's a mathematician. His love for that craft oversees his political ideologies. But if you can combine them, eventually that will be enormous for him.

#### Was there much in the way of research to do?

It's a fantasy world. I mean, I'm a history buff, so I know quite a bit about history. But I didn't use it specifically for the character. We looked at a lot of pictures to get an idea of where to go with his looks. Voller and Indy are kind of stuck in their own period. The 50s and 60s are going over their heads somehow. So they're kind of ancient people in 1969. So they have that in common, and that's about it - and a love for archaeology, obviously.

#### Was it intimidating to step into a scene with Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones?

It's always intimidating to meet your heroes, but Harrison is very easy to meet. He's so down to earth. Before we started shooting, we were just doing rehearsals and hair and make-up. One day, he was just standing outside his trailer, and I think he forgot about it. He was just wearing his jacket and his hat, and was carrying the whip. He was just waiting for something. I was like, 'You're back.' It was just amazing. **JC**

### 'The overwhelming sense of honour of being approached by heroes was intense'

**JAMES MANGOLD**

from his home office, lined with heaving shelves of what looks like books, records, DVDs, and a few banjos. (In the time since our chat, Mangold has since been handed the keys to another plum Lucasfilm gig - see page 7.)

'But also... I always have anxiety about making a sequel in a franchise of any kind, even one as illustrious as this, because I feel like you need to have

something to say,' continues the straight-talking director. 'It's kind of easy to expect that the cultural significance of a successful franchise will do its own work. And I think that produces, sometimes, awkward films.'

After re-examining the movies and grappling with the idea of making one in today's world, Mangold was struck by a crucial problem. 'How do you make an Indiana Jones movie in the late 60s? What are those specific challenges? Thematic, even plotty, and technical?' Echoing Ford's sentiment, for Mangold, Indy's age had to be a factor in the film. 'Not just in terms of him saying, "Oh, my back aches." That's easy and also obvious. I mean more that when you're at a point in your life when you're ➤➔





➤ suddenly taking inventory about what has happened, and where you are because there's not much left... That's not to say I wanted the movie to be *Wild Strawberries* [the 1957 Ingmar Bergman film]. But I did want it to be honest.'

Mangold's highest-grossing film to date, *Logan*, is a swansong for an ageing hero, and he says he wanted *Indy 5* 'to somehow deal with a theme that I'm always attracted to, which is kind of a hero at twilight. To me, it's this interesting moment when someone we know as a kind of legend is no longer appreciated that way in their surroundings. Time has outpaced them; their legends and their adventures have become either forgotten or maybe not even perceived as so cool any more.'

Both Ford and Mangold assert that Spielberg's stamp remains on the film. In terms of working in the Spielbergian style guide established over four movies, Mangold says, 'It would be a collaboration with Steven, even when he was not around and was making *The Fabelmans*. It was a collaboration with Steven's gift to me all my life.' He compares his relationship with Spielberg to that of a young musician listening to their hero and trying to play the same licks.

'The assignment to [braid myself with Spielberg's voice and choices], that was part of the excitement for me,' explains Mangold. 'I grew up on his aesthetics, and I learned from him, and tried to make my own discoveries within that world.'

'There's no denying that Steven's stamp has been on this series all this time, but the primary task for Jim was to develop a script that would be so attractive to me that I could not deny myself the opportunity to do it,' laughs Ford. 'And that he did. He developed it with the Butterworths [brothers Jez and John-Henry]. It's a fantastic script. A very ambitious picture.'

## JOURNEY INTO HISTORY

Magic has often been enmeshed with the McGuffin antiquities that Indy has sought out on his escapades: from the face-melting spirits sealed within the Ark of the Covenant, to the kind of alien tech Arthur C. Clarke might argue was indistinguishable from magic in *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*.

The titular McGuffin in this film is largely a mystery, although in the recent trailer it's described as 'a dial that could change the course of history', and it's clearly

## NO SPIN

### James Mangold on making a standalone adventure...

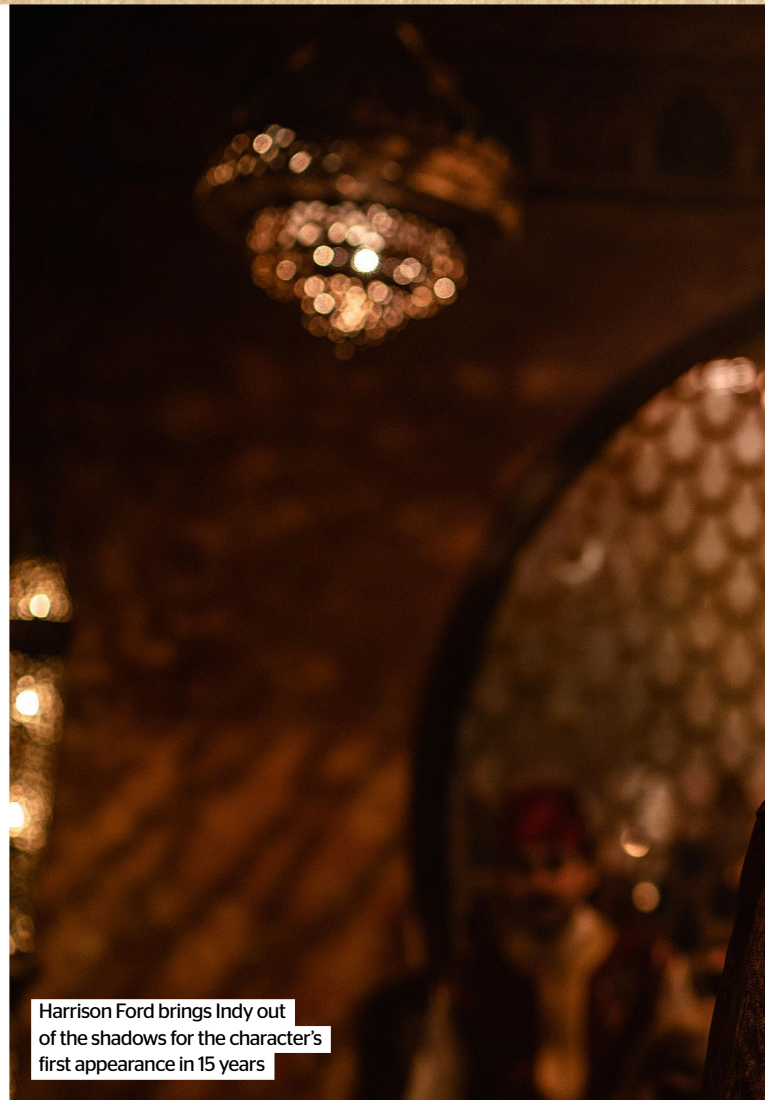
'That's not my goal on movies [to set up spin-offs]. I am really old-fashioned.

I'm very classically minded, and I think Steven [Spielberg] is, too. I make the movie very conscious about the movie being its own self-contained, functioning work of art in any way I can.

'If I feel pressure that I'm supposed to spin off or start to lay Easter eggs or track for some other enterprise later, it feels like a violation to me. Like I can't focus on telling a cohesive story with integrity. I'm making a TV show, is what I feel like at that point.

'I never came under any pressure to do that. The feeling for me was really simple: Harrison Ford is Indiana Jones. And as Harrison Ford grows old, the Indiana Jones movies grow old. And so that was my focus.

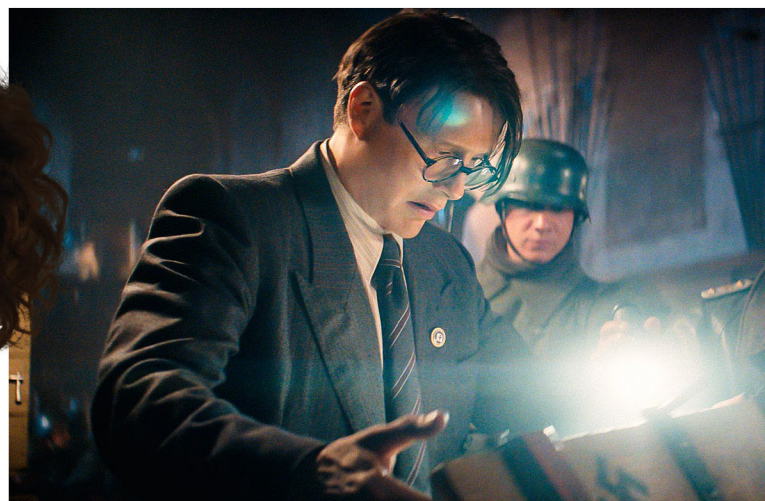
'I do think Phoebe's character is phenomenal, and her performance is phenomenal. But that's a separate question. You could make a movie about any one of these fully realised characters who are in the film. But the goal is to land the plane with the same sense of clarity and satisfaction that the previous films have.' **MM**



Harrison Ford brings Indy out of the shadows for the character's first appearance in 15 years



Mads Mikkelsen (Voller) and director James Mangold on set







something that the professor has been pursuing for a long time.

In 1969, Indiana Jones is retiring from his academic post. Amid the revolution of the era, where cultural horizons are expanding, and the space race is looking to the stars, Indy is somewhat untethered. But maybe that's not an entirely new sensation for the character. 'I think Indy's a man out of time in every time,' offers Ford. 'I think his heart and his soul are invested in the past, and the mystery of the past, and the beauty of discovering the mystery of the past.'

The quest begins with a visit from Helena, Indy's goddaughter. She's portrayed by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the *Fleabag* multihyphenate who has a previous connection to Lucasfilm and another iconic Ford character via *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018) in which she played droid L3-37 opposite Alden Ehrenreich as the young Han. Waller-Bridge stayed in touch with Lucasfilm's Kennedy after that experience, and one night they were having dinner together in what would be the final restaurant trip either had before the pandemic

lockdown began. 'That was quite a situation to go into, [to then] go sit in my room for the next year-and-a-half, thinking about it,' laughs Waller-Bridge. 'She told me over dinner. She said: there's a script being written, and there's a really exciting idea at the heart of it. Would I consider reading it? I fell off my chair, drank a bottle of wine, and said, "Absolutely. Send it over." And then I just fell in love with the script.'

Part of the fun of the Indiana Jones movies has been not knowing who you can trust, and this characteristic would seem to extend to Helena, the catalyst for Indy's final adventure. Ford is full of praise when it comes to what Waller-Bridge brings to Helena: 'Imagination. Intelligence. Grace. Humour. Joy,' he reels off. When it comes to Helena's relationship with Indy, Ford offers the more brusque: 'Fraught. Complicated.'

'She is a very witty and mercurial character,' elaborates Waller-Bridge. 'She's somebody who's part of Indy's past, and is a surprise in some ways, and is a comfort to some extent. And then she turns that expectation on its head, because she has an agenda of her

own, which is hugely fun to play. She's rich and multi-layered. You don't really know what's coming next.'

The dial has a connection to an incident in Indy's past (more on that later), and it's also wanted by Jürgen Voller (Mads Mikkelsen), a scientist who has gone from Nazi to NASA as a key figure in America's Apollo efforts. 'He's loosely based, obviously, on [Nazi party member turned US aeronautics pioneer Wernher] von Braun,' says Mikkelsen, playing the antagonist in another mega-franchise following appearances in James Bond, the MCU, *Star Wars* and the *Wizards of the Coast* World.

'He's a rocket scientist when we see him at this point, but he's basically a mathematician,' adds the actor, cosy in a beanie hat and lots of layers when he dials in from his Denmark home. 'It was not a secret that both the Russians and the Americans – and, to an extent, the British, but not as much – opened their arms and their doors for scientists from the Third Reich. And they closed

**'I fell off my chair, drank a bottle of wine, and fell in love with the script'**

PHOEBE WALLER-BRIDGE

their eyes in regards to whatever atrocity they might have committed.'

Though Voller's look (black coat, wide-brimmed hat, round specs) is extremely reminiscent of *Raiders* wrong'un Toht, Mikkelsen says the characters aren't connected. 'I love that character,' he smiles. 'He's part of making that [specific look] iconic. We didn't go that far with the character. It would have been interesting. [Toht] was more of a henchman, I would say. And this guy is the brain behind a lot of things. So they were not going down the same path. But I am wearing glasses. That's one thing. But we tried to avoid copying him at all, because he did it to perfection.'

Also on bad-guy duties is *Logan* actor Boyd Holbrook, playing Voller's US underling. 'He is the liaison – sort of a lapdog, if you will – to Mads' character,' Holbrook tells *TF* with a grin. 'He is the opposite of the moral compass in this film.' As for how the motorcycle-riding Nazi got his geometrically precise flat-top, Holbrook deadpans, 'They stick your head out the window on the way to work.' ➔



Boyd Holbrook as  
henchman Klaber



## BOYD HOLBROOK

### Introduce your character, Klaber...

For me, in terms of why this person is the way they are - that was just the time and era, and what was going on in the country and the world. I think, really, he's a very confused individual who doesn't know who he is. There's a sense of him wanting to at least belong to something, which lands him in this predicament.

### Do you see parallels between *Dial of Destiny* and *Logan*?

You know, Jim is a fantastic director, and he really is honest. In approaching the subject, he's not going to try to fake it. He's really going to play with what he has.

### We see you on a motorcycle in the trailers...

I mean, just to pull that off was extraordinary. You know, rushing through the streets of New York and Glasgow. It's amazing because all the architecture in Glasgow is the same architecture we used in New York.

### And on the subject of motorcycles, you also have *The Bikeriders* coming up...

The film is incredible. It was up in Cincinnati. I got to work with Michael Shannon, my long-time hero. I met him probably 15 years ago, and asked him how he got into acting. He said, 'Get into theatre.' I was like, 'Oh, yeah. What a great idea.' And now we worked together. So everything is kind of resolved. **MM**

➡ That space-race backdrop of the 1969 setting, which dovetails the action with real events like the moon landing, provides an apposite counterpoint for Indy's perceived values and life's work. 'Indiana Jones and archaeology has always been about finding history below us,' says Waller-Bridge. 'I think it's such a brilliant nod to how far the world had moved on in terms of technology, to look at the above and beyond.'

'You make a movie like this, and you think about what's changed between the 30s and the 40s and the 60s,' muses Mangold. 'Modernism has arrived. Rock 'n' roll has arrived. All these cultural things have arrived. Technology has arrived. All of these things chip away at the innate charm of the period where the classic Indiana Jones films take place. So I wanted to give the audience a chance to behold that polarity, and then to land it in a time of realpolitik and cynicism and confusion, where the bad guys and the good guys are harder to tell apart, and characters like Indy are no longer revered.' But before the 1969 portion of the film gets underway, there's the small matter of the prologue...

## ADVENTURE TIME

*Dial of Destiny* will open with an all-out Indy escapade set in 1944, in a castle inhabited by Nazis. Much talk has already been made of the VFX that will digitally de-age Ford to the era of the original trilogy, or thereabouts. The teaser trailer features a moment of gasp-worthy VFX magic when a bag is pulled from Indy's head, revealing, well, a much younger Indiana Jones than we've seen for a while.

There was nothing particularly unusual about the shooting of the scene. Ford (who could still fit in his original jacket) would act out the scene as normal, albeit with myriad dots on his face to capture the performance.



*Fleabag* star Phoebe  
Waller-Bridge plays Indy's  
goddaughter Helena







Indy tries to catch up as the world keeps changing around him



*Dial of Destiny's* prologue is set in the 1940s and uses CGI to recreate a younger Indiana Jones

'I just shot him, and he just pretended that he was 35,' says Mangold of his 'incredibly gifted and agile' leading man. 'But the technology involved is a whole other thing.'

Differentiating this de-ageing tech from other examples of the practice is the fact that Lucasfilm had reels and reels of footage of Ford in the role in his 30s and 40s. 'We had hundreds of hours of footage of him in close-ups, in mediums, in wides, in every kind of lighting, night and day,' says Mangold. The advancement of the technology also came with additional benefits. 'I could shoot Harrison on a Monday as, you know, a 79-year-old playing a 35-year-old, and I could see dailies by Wednesday with his head already replaced,' continues Mangold. 'Meaning it wasn't a year of effort to get to a first

character in the context of another challenge, perhaps, 25 years earlier, is an intriguing, useful, and extremely sophisticated story device.'

When *TF* asks if he recognises his on-set performance in the final result seen on screen, he responds, 'Yeah. In fact, when I look in the mirror, I still see that guy with brown hair.'

Of course, the main appeal of the Indiana Jones films has never been computer-generated visuals (and some of the biggest criticisms of *Crystal Skull* targeted its over-reliance on CGI). Despite shooting during the pandemic, Mangold resisted working in a sterile 'volume'. 'I really tried to, in all cases, avoid depending upon green screen or visual effects to solve problems when the connection to the earth, the connection to the gear, the physicality

**'It's really crazy to look around and realise, "Wow, this is the final Indiana Jones movie"'**

**BOYD HOLBROOK**

pass. It was an incredible technology, and, in many ways, I just didn't think about it. I just focused on shooting what's [approximately] a 25-minute opening extravaganza that was my chance to just let it rip. The goal was to give the audience a full-bodied taste of what they missed so much. Because then when the movie lands in 1969, they're going to have to make an adjustment to what it is now, which is different from what it was.'

Ford isn't particularly interested in the method of the process, but in its storytelling potential. 'I'm interested in what it brings to the audience,' he says. 'I'm not particularly interested in the technical means of the achievement of it. It's not my jam. But I do think it's a very potent device, and in this case, I think the de-ageing, which sees the

of the stunts, is so critical to the look and feel of an Indiana Jones film.'

Filming took place across the UK (with Glasgow doubling for New York), and beyond. 'And then we went to Morocco for 69,' recalls Mikkelsen. 'We went to Sicily. And it all had that vibe of an Indiana Jones feeling. Back to scratch – everything we wanted for this film.' Adds Holbrook, 'It's just really crazy to look around, and to realise, "Wow, this is the final Indiana Jones movie. Wow, this is really happening."'

As well as a commitment to practical locations, Indiana Jones movies also promise bruising stunt work (you rarely find an action-movie director who wasn't influenced by *Raiders'* truck chase sequence). 'If you're throwing yourself off something, or rolling over something, or being thrown against ➡





## COVER STORY

➤ something, there's very little acting required a lot of the time when you are untrained at it,' says Waller-Bridge of the physical demands of the role. 'My God, it's the most fun acting I've ever done, those stunts. Because you learn this new skill, and you're embodying a character, and, at the same time, you have to completely be as honest as you can.' Waller-Bridge didn't have a great deal of training in advance, because the consensus was that Helena was more of a 'leap before you look' type.

'Harrison does almost everything that he can do, except for the most ludicrous stunts, the most dangerous stunts,' says Mangold. The 80-year-old's physical commitment saw him pick up another injury – this time on his shoulder – which production had to work around while he had physical therapy. When *TF* asks how it compared to the knocks he took on previous instalments, Ford's not really keeping score: 'Every one of these films beat the shit out of me.'

In terms of how Indy's (and Ford's) age informs the stunt side of the film, 'It just makes everything he does a bit more difficult, a little bit more complicated, and a little bit more daunting,' says Ford. 'But he has some companions on his adventure who are part of the process, not just Phoebe...' he says, hinting at a character left to be discovered during the film.

### WEARY INDIANA

Perhaps the most crucial bit of magic in the entire film, though, is that marriage of character and actor. Topping *Total Film's* Greatest Movie Characters poll back in 2017, Indiana Jones is a copper-bottomed cinema icon, but it's impossible to imagine him existing without Harrison Ford.

'I think sometimes there's that magical alchemy of the right part being taken on by the right actor,' says Waller-Bridge. 'I think that actors should really be able to fill in the corners of the places that writers can't reach when they're writing a character. It's a real collaboration. I feel like Harrison didn't just colour it in, but he went all over the lines. There's something about Indiana Jones being a reluctant hero, and a reluctant adventurer to a certain extent. I feel like Harrison has the same thing.'

When *TF* suggests that some of Ford's collaborators must be overawed to work with him, especially when he's playing Indiana Jones, he bats off the suggestion, much more a hardworking craftsman than a movie star. 'I don't

Helena echoes previous favourites from the series, but also brings a fresh energy



## 'This is not your fifth James Bond. This is your **first and original** Indiana Jones'

HARRISON FORD

look for, or agree to see, people who are daunted by me,' he shrugs. 'You know, I'm a working actor. That's it.'

'He has this amazing ability of making everything feel normal, because I think anyone meeting Harrison Ford goes a bit funny,' says Waller-Bridge. 'I was no different. But within about five minutes, he sort of relaxed everybody, and we just got to work. That's what's so great about working with him: he loves the work. And once you're doing that, then you immediately become an equal. He really did treat me like that.'

As to how much Ford is in Dr. Jones,

Mangold says, 'I think every great actor takes aspects of their personality. Film is too much of a microscope to invent 100% a character from your imagination. You have to bring part of yourself.'

Ford isn't shy of a one-word answer, and simply says 'Yes', when asked if there's an essence of Indiana Jones that stayed consistent since 1981. Needed to elaborate, the answer is obvious.

'I think the continuum is the fact that it's the same actor playing him,' he states, matter-of-factly. 'This is not your fifth Bond. This is your first and original Indiana Jones.'





## PHOEBE WALLER-BRIDGE

**Introduce your character, Helena...**

She comes and turns everything upside down, basically. But she was a lot of fun to play, and they really nailed a humour and wit that is already in the DNA of the series. They created a really fresh character to carry that through again.

**Does she have any literal or spiritual counterparts from the previous films?**

I think they really achieved something extraordinary: she fits into the canon, and she feels like there is certainly an energy that she shares with all the characters that have come before, especially with the female parts, but she is unique, and she has a fresh voice.

She was somebody who was mysterious from the off. I think [Indy's] often been the mystery to those characters before, especially his female counterparts, and I think there's something really unusual in how they flip that here.

**John Williams has written a theme for Helena...**

I still haven't really found the words for that. I managed to actually meet John at the Oscars. To be able to say thank you to him for all the work that has inspired me over the years, but then also to specifically say, 'Thank you for writing me a theme,' was one of the purest and most precious moments in this side of my professional life. That was the best. **MM**

He gives another one-and-a-bit-word answer when asked if he ever thinks about what he'd like the legacy of the series to be. 'Uh... no.' Although he is a little more expansive when he talks definitively about *Dial of Destiny* being his final outing as the iconic adventurer. 'This is the final film in the series, and this is the last time I'll play the character,' he asserts. 'I anticipate that it will be the last time that he appears in a film. I'm aware of the fact that there are plans underway – or underfoot – for a television version of the Indiana Jones experience, but I'll not be involved in that, if it does come to fruition.'

Mangold talks of being keen to win over sceptics, and bringing them into the excitement of his movies'

worlds, be it car racing in *Le Mans '66*, or Johnny Cash's music in *Walk the Line* ('The person I'm always trying to win over is the person who's like, "Eh, not for me"... Almost like a politician, I'm trying to win the independents').

While Ford does think the film would work as a standalone viewing experience, it is, he says, 'a richer experience for having seen the others'. He continues, 'I expect that we will not have to depend on those that have not seen one of the Indiana Jones films, because the luck of my life is that these have become family films that are passed

on from generation to generation.'

And with that, it's time for Ford to go (he is in production on a huge Marvel movie, remember), but he heads off into the sunset with some effusive closing remarks. 'I had been ambitious to do this film for 10 years, and there finally came a time when we all committed to that. It was a joyous moment for me. I think it's a rare situation that I find myself in. I've been able to deliver amazing films developed by Steven and George over a 40-year period, and to end it not with a whimper, but a bang, has been my greatest ambition for this excursion.'

**INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 JUNE.**



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# VERSE

# NESS

The Spider-Verse is back! Ahead of the arrival of the long-awaited sequel to one of the most acclaimed animated films in recent years - and one of the most acclaimed superhero films, period - *Total Film* meets the team behind **SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE** to talk about the challenge of juggling multiple Spideys, game-changing visuals, and sky-high fan expectations.

**WORDS** LEILA LATIF





When Sam Raimi's Spider-Man films first swung into the multiplex, the concept of 'superhero fatigue' was unimaginable. The trilogy had audiences champing at the bit to see who, or what, our friendly neighbourhood superhero would be battling next. In the decades since, superhero films have continued to dominate the box office, but entries now come so thick and fast the hunger for more isn't quite what it used to be.

Unless, of course, you are actually talking about Spider-Man.

The prospect of seeing the beloved web-slinger still has critics and audiences counting down to each entry. And within the films themselves, it's a case of the more Spider-Men the better! Fans practically levitated seeing Tobey Maguire, Andrew Garfield and Tom Holland team up in *No Way Home*, but the bar had already been set almost insurmountably high by six Spider-People and one Spider-Pig in *Into the Spider-Verse*. The animated feature is arguably the apex of this oeuvre, a stunningly realised tale of Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) and a team of Spider-heroes from parallel dimensions stopping the universe collapsing in on itself.

'People cannot get enough!' exclaims producer Amy Pascal, who once headed up the Spider-Man-producing studio Sony before striking out on her own. She's back to produce this summer's sequel, *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, alongside returning producers (and writers) Phil Lord and Christopher Miller. 'I've been working on Spider-Man movies for 25 years, and there's still endless amounts of stories to be told,' Pascal tells *TF*, 'because whether it's Peter or Miles or Gwen, they have the most

human dilemma: if people know who you truly are, will they still love you?'

Audiences clearly still loved the many versions contained in *Into the Spider-Verse*. Its box office was around the GDP of a small nation, the reviews read like love letters, and it took Best Animated Feature at the 2019 Academy Awards.

While producer Pascal gets occasionally frustrated when people speculate when a superhero film will finally win an Oscar ('One already did!'), she feels that it's just a matter of time before animation gets the respect it deserves. 'It's an antiquated idea that animation is a lesser category, but some day everyone will see it the same way we do.' If the Spider-Verse teaches us anything, it's that greatness comes in many forms and 'whether it's a person or a pig, we're able to identify with Spider-Man's struggles. They all have different problems, but the same identity crisis. That famous comic-book picture that's half-face, and half-Spider says it better than anything else: it's a constant internal battle.'

Portraying that internal battle is a huge commitment with animation as ambitious as the Spider-Verse films, and the first entry required the largest crew Sony had ever assembled. Three

directors, Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers and Justin K. Thompson, were then brought on to create its sequel. The trio, who talk to *Total Film* after working on the project for nearly five years, admit that such a long gestation means succumbing to a level of 'madness'. Dos Santos shakes his head and explains, 'Things that were once funny start not becoming funny, and serious things start becoming funny because you've been sitting with it so long it seems ridiculous.'

Powers laughs. 'We forget what's good and not good any more. It made the audience preview very high pressure.'

While the pressure of following up such a beloved property is profound, the directors can at least be confident that, following the first film's success, cinemagoers are open to the possibility of a broader spectrum of Spider-People. Over a decade ago Donald Glover was rumoured to helm a live-action incarnation and joked in a 2012 comedy special that even a tiny internet rumour about a Black Spider-Man meant 'the world went crazy. Half the world was like, "Donald for Spider-Man!", and the other half was like, "He's Black! Kill him!"'

Comedy and internet hyperbole aside, the Spider-Verse proved the hero could







This instalment's bad guy is comic book 'joke' the Spot, voiced by Jason Schwartzman



Miles and Gwen are back, again voiced by Shameik Moore and Hailee Steinfeld



Expect more of the first film's gloriously fun aesthetic



be different races, genders and genres, and caught up with the comics, where a vast spectrum of characters was primed for adaptation. 'There were almost too many!' says Dos Santos. 'We had to really slow ourselves down and figure out what would be most interesting to see.'

## TRICKY SPOT

The selection of potential villains was nearly as enormous, and the directors' choice of the Spot was unexpected, as Powers admits he's considered 'a joke'. But what made him perfect for the next two instalments of the Spider-Verse is his ability to move between dimensions, not to mention the animation potential, which Thompson took the lead on. 'Everything I try to do visually has a story,' says Thompson. 'What was interesting about the Spot is that he didn't know where he belonged or understand his potential. I started thinking about how I could tie that to comic books. Comics start out rough and very loose with blue pencil and pencil sketches, and build as they add ink, paint and colour. And so we thought, what if he's still just this raw energy of the artist's rough page, and you see all that blue pencil and the potential for something that's continually developing into something greater? His ink spots are just like splatters of ink that just fell on the page or maybe are an afterthought of the artist mid-drawing.'

Powers hints at the surprising connection that Miles and the Spot

(voiced by Jason Schwartzman) have, and extends credit to the production team's vision for a unique style of animation that has him 'in perpetual motion even when standing still'. But leading a massive team of over 1,000 people to create 240 unique characters seems a Herculean task, even for three directors. Talking to the trio it's clear this was accomplished because of how in sync and enthusiastic about each other they are.

Just like a team of interdimensional Spider-heroes, these very different people worked together for the greater good. They are quick to highlight each other's strengths, and sweetly direct questions from *Total Film* to who they collectively decide would give the best answer. This ego-free camaraderie formed early on. 'We were doing everything together, [so] people's different strengths come out,' says Powers. 'As the project went on we became more siloed into our respective specialities.'

Joaquim Dos Santos was a storyboard artist and director on the DC animated slate and *The Legend of Korra*. Kemp

**'EVERYTHING I TRY TO DO VISUALLY HAS A STORY'**

JUSTIN K. THOMPSON

Powers is the celebrated playwright behind *One Night in Miami...* and the writer and co-director of Pixar's *Soul*, which won a Best Animated Feature Oscar two years after *Into the Spider-Verse*. Justin K. Thompson was the only one with Spider-Verse experience. 'As the production designer on the first film, I'm known for being able to create amazing visuals,' he says. 'So I spend more time on that side of things while Kemp and Justin are writing, storyboarding and working with the actors. But we became one during development, so fully trusted in what the others were doing.'

One of the most beloved figures the trio wanted to further explore was Gwen Stacy, to enter her universe and explore the artistry of her iterations in the comics. Powers and Dos Santos defer to Thompson to explain. 'Gwen is very emotionally angsty but has no one to really talk to,' says Thompson. 'In the look of her world, we wanted it to be like a mood ring that would react to her bottled-up feelings.'

But Gwen's problems are not ones that could just be unpacked with a therapist. 'There's a manhunt going



# UNFAMILIAR FACES



A FEW OF THE MOST OBSCURE SPIDEYS WHO HAVE HAD BLINK-AND-MISS-'EM CAMEOS IN ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE'S TRAILERS...

## 1. SPINNERET AND ANNA-MAY PARKER (EARTH-18199)

Peter Parker's wife and daughter who fight alongside him in their timeline, going by the aliases of Spinneret and Spiderling.

## 2. SPIDER MONKEY (MARVEL APES)

A valued member of the Ape-vengers. This isn't a metaphor; he really is a monkey.

## 3. SUPERIOR SPIDER-MAN (AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #700)

A terminally ill Otto Octavius swapped brains with an unsuspecting Peter Parker and became determined to be a better hero than his predecessor.

## 4. MANGAVERSE SPIDER-MAN (EARTH-2301)

A trained ninja and member of the Spider Clan, he tragically lost his sensei Ben to Venom.

## 5. SPIDER-JOCK (WHAT IF? #7)

One of the earliest in the *What If* series saw the creation of Captain Spider, when Peter's high-school bully Flash Thompson was bitten instead of him.

## 6. LADY SPIDER (EARTH-803)

Maybelle Reilly, aka a young Aunt May, became a steampunk arachnid superhero.

## 7. THE BOMBASTIC BAG-MAN (THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #257)

Not technically a fully fledged incarnation but a reference to the brief time that Peter Parker had to improvise and use an old Fantastic Four suit and a paper bag on his head to conceal his identity.

## 8. ANYA (AÑA) CORAZÓN (EARTH-616)

Anya Corazón aka Araña (Spanish for spider) is a Hispanic teen who was given powers by the Spider Society via a mystical spider tattoo.

## 9. SPIDER-BYTE (EARTH-22191)

Hailing from a future where humanity lives largely in cyber-space, Margo becomes Spider-Byte to fight crime virtually.

## 10. SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN (THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN)

Fans of the animated show that was unjustly cancelled after two seasons will be thrilled to see its teenage Peter Parker back.



Miles struggles keeping his secret from his mother (Luna Lauren Vélez)

➔ on for her because she's accused of murdering her best friend,' Thompson says. 'She's also breaking up with her bandmates and it spills out into different colours and textures. You see and feel the shifts in real time of her sorrow, joy, anger or frustration.' But coordinating each object in the frame to reflect a character's inner turmoil has unsurprisingly been challenging. 'It's been so much work! But it's really amazing to watch the audience get so swept up in how her world around her reacts to her.'

Dos Santos uncharacteristically interrupts to ask, 'I don't know if you guys remember, but there was a scene where Gwen and her father talk, and the scene transitions visually? Somebody asked us for a print of those three panels because it looks like the most beautiful pop art. Despite the same camera set-up, the same composition, they evoke different feelings through the colour stories.' Even in the 'madness' of spending years immersed in every Spider-Verse detail, it was then that something crystallised for Dos Santos, beaming as he remembers feeling, "OK, we're on to something here!"

Gwen's emotional world is made all the more fraught as her father is the police officer tasked with tracking the vigilante he believes murdered Peter Parker. Miles, with his police-officer father, is in a somewhat similar predicament. While the ferocity of

## 'THE SECRECY OF SPIDER-MAN DRIVES A HUGE WEDGE'

KEMP POWERS

the investigation into Miles pales in comparison to what Gwen faces, Powers is keen to point out that, 'Spider-Man has always been viewed as a vigilante, but for Miles and Gwen, the people who are most critical of Spider-Man happen to be their parents.'

Beyond the mechanics of these individual police investigations, the notion of justice differs between universes. 'Spider-Man 2099's sense of justice and moral compass runs almost directly opposite to Miles', explains Powers. 'He represents the most significant shift of what it means to be a Spider-Person.' The 'humourless' character, also known as Miguel O'Hara, is voiced by Oscar Isaac and differs from the status quo on every level. 'Miles and Gwen and even Peter move with a gymnastic elegance, but Miguel's the opposite, and his personality carries that same trait,' continues Powers. 'He's inflexible and steadfast in what's right and wrong, even when that means breaking things along the way.'

Working with extremely different (and potentially dubious) Spider-People, evading arrest and battling trans-





dimensional villains is not all Miles has to contend with in *Across the Spider-Verse*; he's also growing into a man and navigating what that means for his relationships with his beloved parents. Dos Santos describes it as 'a dual coming-of-age, for this kid and for his parents at the same time'. While his mother, Rio Morales (*Dexter*'s Luna Lauren Vélez), was only glanced at in the first film, the sequel spends more time on the mother-son dynamic. 'Rio's son really is her baby, unlike Peter Parker who in the lore is an orphan with a pretty independent life,' says Powers. 'Miles is really close to both his mother and his father and the secrecy of Spider-Man drives a huge wedge. They're the kind of helicopter parents who would immediately notice if anything was wrong with their son and a lot is wrong with him.'

The action picks up a year later, and close-knit family is still grieving Miles' Uncle Aaron, who was murdered in the previous film. That loss was what ultimately bonded Miles to that group of Spider-People, and in one of its most moving scenes, four people and one pig share their grief, and living with 'not being able to save everybody'. That lingering devastation, Powers says, 'comes up in this for sure. Miles is grappling with not having his uncle while he's going through this incredibly awkward time in his life of being 15 or 16 when you grow eight inches, but you're not really a man yet. One of the wonderful things is that transcends races and cultures. We've all struggled with growing up and we've all lost people that we love.'

Just as loss bonded him to Peter B. Parker, Spider-Ham, Spider-Man Noir

and SP//dr, in *Across the Spider-Verse* Miles has new cohorts to bond with, including pregnant Spider-Woman Jessica Drew (Issa Rae) and Hobie Brown aka Spider-Punk (Daniel Kaluuya). Many other appearances are guarded like state secrets, but the directors let slip that Scarlet Spider, a clone from Dos Santos' favourite era of the comics, will appear. Dos Santos seems desperate to reveal more but stops himself. 'I can't wait for people to hear who voices him,' he says. 'It still hasn't been released, but I love our Scarlet Spider actor.' When *Total Film* asks for a hint, Powers admits, 'Not even the actors know! Everyone is sworn to secrecy, and they record alone, so most of them are discovering with the public who is in the film they've been making. Their reactions have been pretty hilarious.'

## HEARING VOICES

They confirm that many unexpected appearances are in store, but the directors have a couple more months of secrecy ahead. 'My favourite cameo is...' Powers teases, 'a secret! But I promise it's gonna blow your eyeballs out the backside of your head.'

Even those that have pored over every poster, clip and trailer have plenty of surprises in store. The unannounced cast members' voices will also be instantly recognisable, not over styled into oblivion like Mike Myers in *Shrek* or Steve Carell in *Despicable Me*. Powers was 'drawn to how these actors really sound. We cast Daniel Kaluuya based on listening to his interviews and his voice when he is just speaking. If you talk to Shameik Moore, you can't separate him from Miles Morales – that's just his voice.'

After five very long years, another chance to hear Moore's voice coming out from Miles' animated face is as exciting a prospect as seeing any other Spideys who have swung back into action recently. But for the directors, who have poured their whole selves into this film, reaching the final hurdle comes with a tangible sense of relief. 'It's been a long road,' sighs Dos Santos. 'People are counting on this film to live up to the first one but I most want people to experience the Spider-Verse with a real sense of joy.' His fellow directors nod in agreement as he continues. 'If we deliver joy we'd be really happy with that.'



**SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE** OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 JUNE.



# SHORE




*The Little Mermaid* is the latest Disney animated classic seeking box-office glory with a live-action remake. But, as Ariel knows, changing form doesn't happen without complications. *Total Film* meets the team hoping to make a *big* splash.

WORDS MATT MAYTUM





# THING



**W**hen *Total Film* last met director Rob Marshall – in New York, in 2018, as he was beginning the press tour on *Mary Poppins Returns* in earnest – rumours were bubbling that his next project would also involve revisiting another beloved Disney property. Live-action versions of *The Jungle Book* and *Beauty and the Beast* were proving what big business the vault could yield

(taking \$967m and \$1.27bn at the box office respectively). *The Little Mermaid* seemed ideally suited for the treatment, but Marshall (best known for musicals like the Oscar-winning *Chicago*) was still in the ‘we’ll see’ stage then. ‘There’s a lot of work to do,’ he pondered when *TF* asked if he was heading under the sea. ‘There’s one underwater sequence in ➔



## MAKING OF

➤ [Mary Poppins Returns], and I was like, “Wow, that was complicated enough.”

Cut to five years later, and work is almost complete on Marshall’s *The Little Mermaid*. So, what convinced him to dive in? ‘I have no interest in taking an animated film, and doing a full-on remake of it; like an honest-to-God remake,’ he says candidly. ‘I really thought: the only reason to do this is if we can bring something else to this.’

The recent Disney remakes have varied from shot-for-shot adaptations to much looser interpretations of the cherished childhood favourites. What helped Marshall find a way in was going back to the source: Hans Christian Andersen’s 1837 fairy tale on which the 1989 animated film was loosely based. ‘It’s actually a modern story, in a way, of a young girl who feels displaced; who doesn’t feel she belongs; and who feels she belongs somewhere else; and truly believes that, and is not afraid of the other. And in our film and in the story, the other is the human world.’

‘It felt modern to me. It felt very relevant because of the world we live in, which is, in many ways, so divisive and divided. This felt like an antidote to that, about a young girl who believed that she could build bridges, and not be afraid of the other.’

For anyone who didn’t grow up with the (hologram-protected) VHS playing on a loop, *The Little Mermaid* is the story of Ariel, a teenage

### ‘IT’S A MODERN STORY OF A YOUNG GIRL WHO FEELS DISPLACED’

ROB MARSHALL

mermaid princess obsessed with life on land. When she saves the dashing human prince Eric from a shipwreck, she’s smitten, and so is he (well, at least with her hazily remembered silhouette and beautiful singing voice). Desperate to see him again, Ariel makes a Faustian pact with sea-witch Ursula, in which she gives up her voice for a pair of legs so that she might go on land and win over Eric. Of course, it’s not quite that simple...

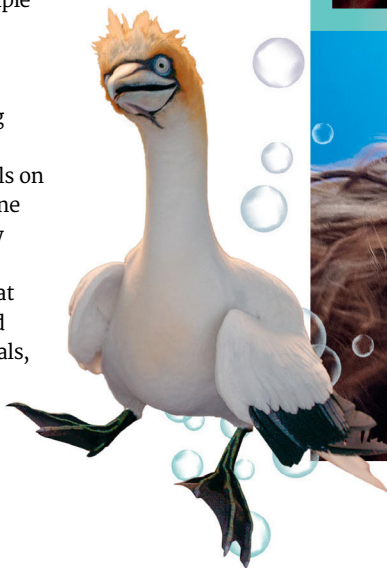
While the story’s slight, the film remains beloved for its characters (it’s a rare example of mermaids reaching their cinematic potential), and particularly its songs. Its success ushered in a new golden age of musicals at Disney Animation. Something that Marshall remembers well.

‘It really was the resurgence of musicals on film,’ Marshall recalls. ‘They had been gone for years. Just dead. I was in the Broadway community at that time. I just remember how excited everybody was by the idea that musicals were coming back. And it started the whole renaissance of animated musicals, with *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*...’ Its influence didn’t just stop there, reckons Marshall. ‘In a way, I felt like it opened

Halle Bailey plays Princess Ariel, with Jonah Hauer-King as the dashing Prince Eric (right)

Javier Bardem takes on the role of King Triton (below right)

Awkwafina is the voice of the now-female Scuttle (below)







## THE LITTLE MERMAID

me for Ariel, because my version of her was the one that we all know – the bright red hair, the pale skin. The fact that they were open to seeing different ethnicities was something really different to me, and made me really excited to audition for the role.'

With depressing inevitability, the 'colour-blind' casting of a young Black woman as Ariel was met with some racist trolling online, amid the positive reactions to the film's progressive representation. After she recently commented in an interview that 'As a Black person, you just expect it and it's not really a shock any more,' *TF* asks if she's able to protect herself from the online trolls in some way.

'Absolutely, yeah,' she responds. 'I think, just with time, it becomes the normal. In today's world, we've gotten so far. We're in 2023, and we're making such advancements as a society and a community. But at the end of the day, there are just things that are normal, especially as a Black person in America, that you are just used to dealing with. So, of course, I did expect it, but I have a way of protecting myself, just by not reading all of those, and centring myself with my family and my loved ones, and paying attention to the positivity, like all the various reactions that made me so happy. It's just kind of staying above it all in that way. It's a sad reality but that's not shocking at all.'

'I think she gets that this is a big deal, and that she's kind of out there as a pioneer,' adds Marshall on the subject. 'I think she's very proud of that, and I think she's a very optimistic and positive person, like I am myself. She'll only focus on what's good. It happens with every change in the world. As things start to change, people don't want to see things change and move. But you have to kind of just stick to your guns and be proud. I think she's very smart. She's much smarter than I am on social media, that's for sure. I think she knows how to navigate this in a really positive way.'

For Marshall, misgivings will evaporate when any doubter sees Bailey in the role. 'It's her,' he says. 'She's Ariel. It's nothing to do with skin colour. How archaic is that? She's the character. You'll feel it. I think people will see it, and it'll disappear very quickly.'

## OCEAN PICTURE

When it comes to making this Ariel timely, Bailey says, 'I would say the only kind of update that our film has is the update of what it means to be a woman in today's world. This is a modern version of our film, and I'm grateful that it is, particularly with Ariel's story. It's not just about her falling in love, and meeting a prince, and wanting to move to the Above World because of that prince – which is beautiful. But it's also about what she wants for herself and her future and her goals and her passions. That's why I'm really excited for people to see our take on it, because I feel that they will appreciate the updates that we've made with our world today.'

the door for *Chicago*, my first film, as a live-action musical. It helped audiences accept that film. So I always felt a deep connection there.'

## SEA CHANGE

It wasn't just the musical that got a jump-start: it heralded a new era of Disney classics after a decade of variable-quality animated output. *The Little Mermaid* still stands on its own two feet, even if certain elements remain of their time. While Marshall scoffs at the widely bandied notion that 1989 Ariel is a 'passive' protagonist, he still talks of wanting to expand the story.

'When you go back, you realise that she really isn't passive,' he says. 'I don't know where that's [come from]... Because she is very headstrong. She goes against her father's wishes, and she wants legs, and she gives up everything to get those legs, and to become human. She's kind of very powerful and strong and courageous. We leaned into that more, for sure. But it's there in the bones of it, you know? I think the biggest thing is, she doesn't give up her voice to get a guy. That's not our film... She's a teenager. She wants it so badly that she doesn't know what the consequences are of actually giving up her voice for what she wants.'

A modern *The Little Mermaid* needs a modern Ariel. There was a traditional lengthy casting search ('We were sort of looking at everybody: every ethnicity; every kind of Ariel possible'), but the lead was found more serendipitously. Marshall saw Halle Bailey performing with her sister Chloe (they're R&B duo Chloe x Halle) at the 2018 Grammys. Their rendition of Donny Hathaway and Roberta Flack's *Where Is the Love* transfixed him. 'I thought, "Who is this girl? Look at her. She's so otherworldly,"' he remembers. 'She had this glorious voice. There was an innocence about her, which I think is so important for this character.'

That landed Halle Bailey an invitation to come in and audition, and she raised the bar to a level that no one else could reach. A screen test sealed the deal, for Marshall, and for everyone at Disney. 'And you'll see,' promises Marshall. 'She's really special.'

Bailey herself grew up a massive fan of the animated film, but had no idea it was being adapted until she got called in to audition. 'It was just a shock to me, because I was excited with the fact that they were going to do a live-action version,' she tells *Total Film*. 'I was interested in what that would be like. I was also interested and excited that they would consider



» That prince is Eric, played here by Jonah Hauer-King (TV's *Little Women* and *World on Fire*). He also tells *TF* about expanding a character somewhat slenderly sketched in the 1989 film. 'It was partly a script and a story thing,' he says. 'It was the introduction of a mother character for him, played by Noma Dumezweni, who's amazing. That really helped us, I think, understand who he is, and where he's come from, and what he wants from life. And also giving him a song [helped], because you literally are giving him a voice.'

Yes, additional songs are another facet of the expansion of the original. The 1989 film featured music by Alan Menken and lyrics by the late Howard Ashman. Here, Menken returns, and he's joined by *Hamilton/Encanto* virtuoso Lin-Manuel Miranda on lyrics. Miranda – a *Little Mermaid* superfan who named his son Sebastian after Ariel's crab confidant – is also a producer.

Hauer-King credits the new songs as being the best of both Ashman and Miranda. 'They needed to feel timeless and classic,' he says. 'But especially with Lin, it's bringing so much of that contemporary flair and that lyrical flair.'



## 'I'VE NEVER DONE A BIG STUDIO FILM BEFORE'

JONAH HAUER-KING

I can say this, because I obviously take literally no credit, but I think it's an amazing song. And I think that whoever ended up singing it would be very blessed.'

Ariel also gets a new song. 'I realised, "Well, Ariel only has one song in the original film,"' says Marshall. "'Maybe she should have another song. Maybe there should be more story.'" That ties into Marshall's ethos of building on what was already there. 'I really

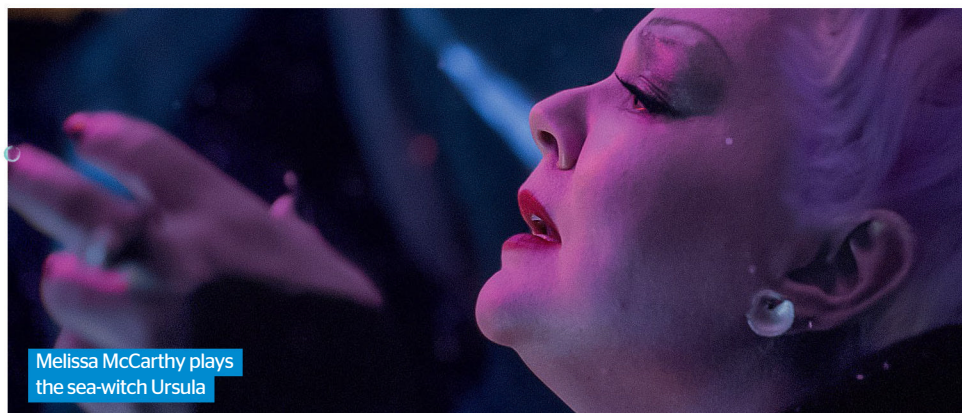
wanted to reimagine it, and hold on to what people love, and what I loved, about it. But then to also expand it into a fuller story.'

As well as songs like *Under the Sea* and *Part of Your World*, other familiar elements include Ariel's dad King Triton (Javier Bardem), as well as her underwater pals like Sebastian (Daveed Diggs), Flounder (Jacob Tremblay) and seabird Scuttle (Awkwafina). And, of course, the aforementioned sea-witch, Ursula, figures prominently.

Played by Melissa McCarthy, half-woman/half-octopus Ursula has her own nefarious motives for getting Ariel to sign her voice away. 'Obviously [McCarthy] has a great sense of humour,' says Marshall. 'We know that. But I don't think people know the power and the depth that she's playing in this part. Because we have to understand why this person is the villain.'

Marshall also points out that McCarthy's background as a drag performer, early in her career, was useful for embodying the camp favourite. 'What's fun about that is, she understood the genesis of where this came from,' explains Marshall. 'It was all built around the character of [John Waters regular] Divine.' In rehearsals, eight dancers would stand in for Ursula's tentacles to give a sense of her expanse. It's one way in which Marshall is mixing old school with cutting-edge tech (much as he did in nostalgic classic *Mary Poppins Returns*).

For the scenes on land, expect the lavish sets you find on the biggest blockbusters. 'I've never done a big studio film before,' beams Hauer-King. 'You show up, and it's a town. It's a whole town. You just have these enormous containers which look like nothing on the outside – just like steel, grey, airplane hangars. You walk through a tiny, little door in the corner, and you



Melissa McCarthy plays the sea-witch Ursula



Ariel gains human form to experience the human world – but is left unable to speak



enter another world. You enter a palace, or you enter a rainforest. And it's just so exciting.'

## STRANGER FINS

While Bailey got to be part of that world, much of her experience in the underwater realm entailed blue screen, hydraulic rigs and tracking marks on her clothes for where the digital costume would be added in post-production. She would occasionally have a 'proxy tail' to wear to get a sense of its size, and had to don a wig cap for all underwater scenes, for which the characters' hair always had to be added digitally in post. 'I wanted to make sure that the technical aspect of the film didn't lead the film,' says Marshall, who initially worked out scenes with previsualisation animation, and then with the actors 'on foot', ascertaining what would be needed via the rigs. 'I'm very grateful that I'm a choreographer, so I could understand how this moves. But it was the most complicated thing and the most challenging thing I've ever done.'

He also incorporated real dancers into the choreography, in a way which honoured the Disney legacy. 'When you look at a number like *Under the Sea*, for example, Halle's the only live actor in that whole piece. It's a huge production number with hundreds and hundreds of CGI-animated but photo-real fish and creatures under the water.' To help work the sequence out, Marshall brought in the Alvin Ailey company from New York, 'so that we could create the number, and then we could use their bodies as prototypes for the CGI artists. I got that idea from Walt Disney himself, because he used Ballet Russe when he created *Fantasia*, and was able to work with them for his artists.'

We'll find out soon enough if *The Little Mermaid* joins *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King* in the upper echelons of the Disney remakes when it comes to billion-dollar box office, but the feverish anticipation that greets each trailer and new look at the film suggests there will be a pretty big audience for this one.

But whether that means we'll eventually get to see *another* part of this world is unknown for now. When *TF* asks if there's potential to further explore – as Barry Jenkins is doing with prequel *Mufasa: The Lion King* – Marshall responds, 'I know there have been the prequels and sequels to the animated film – like, the straight-to-video kind of things, you know? It's a classic story that has a lot of characters and a lot of interesting stories. I do think it's right for certain things. But you have to see how a movie plays, and how it does... I think there's always opportunity to find stories within stories. That's always a wonderful thing.' But for now, he just seems relieved to have been able to adapt and expand this particular tale. 'I'm glad we were able to take this one to live-action, because it really is a very powerful tale, and very emotional.'

**THE LITTLE MERMAID OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 MAY.**

DISNEY: PORTRAIT: AUSTIN HARGRAVE



## HALLE BAILEY

### Was it daunting portraying a character that you and so many others have grown up with?

Absolutely, yeah. It's a little bit of pressure because this movie means so much to all of us, from since we were so young. But even for myself, to live up to the expectations that I had of the original film, I really think that we did it for this new version. And I'm so excited for people to see it.

### What was the screen test and auditioning process like?

The screen test was so much fun, actually. I had never done a screen test for anything this massive before. They had a wonderful costume designer, Colleen Atwood, come to my house and she measured me. That was after my third audition, and I was like, 'Wow, this Oscar-winning lady is coming to my house right now to fit me? That's crazy.' I just remember thinking, 'This is the most beautiful thing that I've ever worn – and it's just for a screen test?'

### How do the on-screen underwater visuals compare to what you filmed on set?

It's crazy because when you look at the behind-the-scenes – like, the making of it – it looks completely different than what you see on screen. Even at D23, that was the first time I saw *Part of Your World* too, and I was like, 'Oh my God. No way. No way is that me in the leotard and the cap and the styrofoam set behind us. It looks like this?' It's just amazing.

### You've got another big musical, *The Color Purple*, coming up too...

*The Color Purple* was so much fun for me to film. It's another classic story that we all loved for a very long time, and I loved the fact that it's a musical. Getting to incorporate my artistry and singing into this film was something really exciting. I got to write an original song for the film that's in it, and just playing young Nettie, the sister – it was really beautiful. I just felt like I was pulling from my experience of being a little sister. **MM**



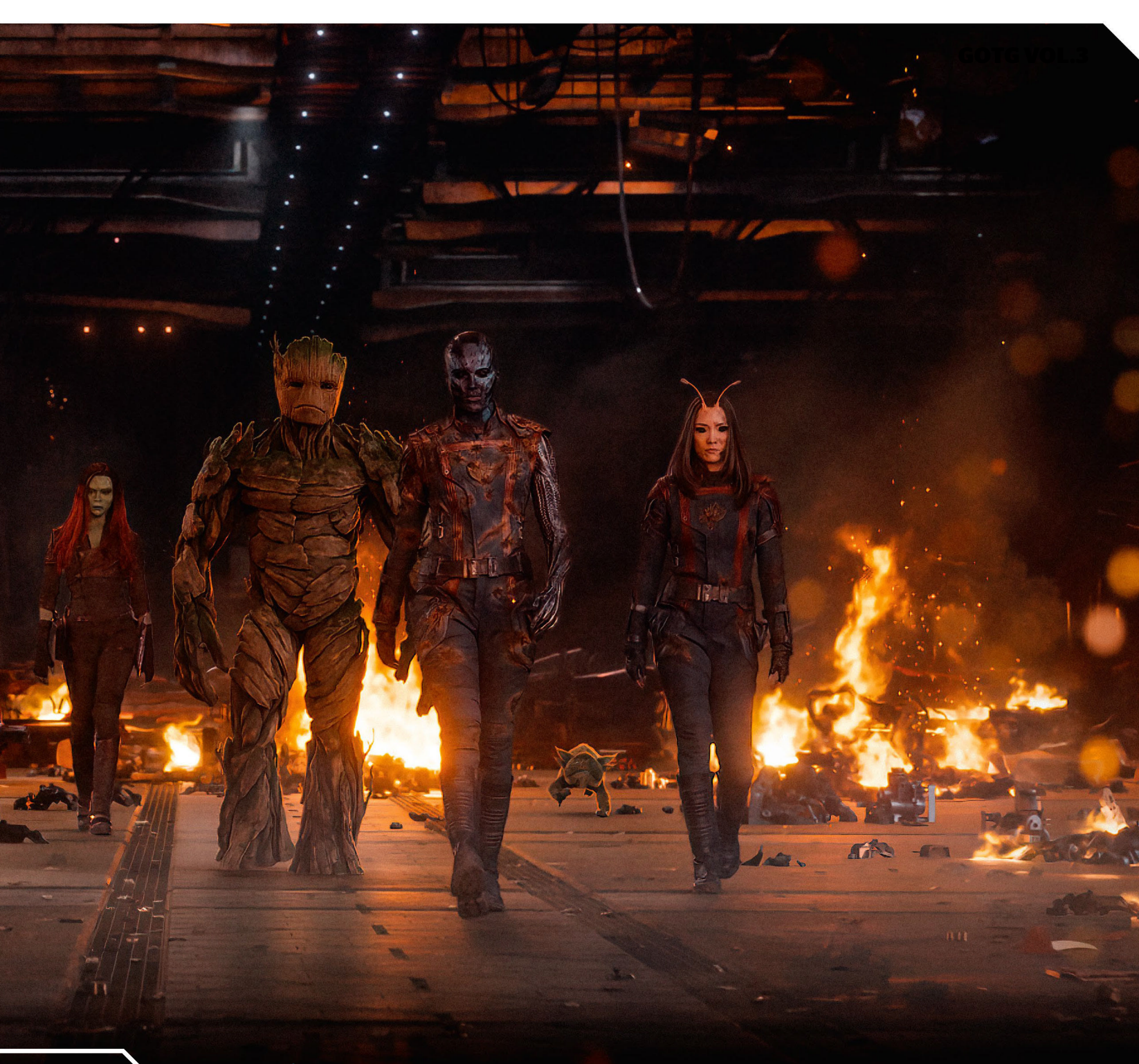


# FACING

As the Marvel Cinematic Universe's lovable bunch of a-holes prepare to bow out in style in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, *Total Film* meets with filmmaker James Gunn and the cast to get the score on the long-awaited threequel.

WORDS MATT MAYTUM





# THE MUSIC





hen *Total Film* asks writer/director James Gunn if he expects there to be a strong feeling of conclusion for audiences watching *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, he responds in characteristically straight-talking fashion. 'I know there is, because I've seen it with a lot of audiences already.'

*Vol. 3* has been described by Gunn as 'the end of this iteration of the Guardians', and everything's pointing to a sense of finality that's rare in the ever-evolving Marvel Cinematic Universe. The *Guardians* films have always been among the funniest and the most moving films of the MCU, and the team looks set to go out with a bang (and quite a few whimpers, by the sounds of it).

At the heart of this film will be Rocket, the genetically modified, wisecracking raccoon (voiced by Bradley Cooper). Gunn calls Rocket 'the secret protagonist' of this trilogy, and it's his arc that'll take centre stage. But there are a bunch of other Guardians to consider too. There's leader Peter 'Star-Lord' Quill; tree-being of few words Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel); overly literal warrior Drax the Destroyer (Dave Bautista); and relative newcomers to the team Nebula (Karen Gillan), Mantis (Pom Klementieff) and Cosmo the Spacedog (voiced by Maria Bakalova). And that's not even to mention Gamora (Zoe Saldana), the badass, green-skinned assassin and object of Quill's affections. Only, this Gamora is an alt-timeline version, the original Guardian having been sacrificed by Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War*.

Here the Guardians have to contend with the High Evolutionary (Chukwudi Iwuj), a nefarious genetic scientist with links to Rocket's past, and Adam Warlock (Will Poulter), a gold-skinned, superpowered being created by the Sovereign in *Vol. 2*.

That's a lot for one movie to deal with, but this is more than just one movie. It's the culmination of a story that's been in the works for the best part of a decade. Since *Guardians of the Galaxy* arrived in 2014, the *Awesome Mix*-blasting motley crew have been an MCU delight. It's only fair they get a fitting send-off, as James Gunn switches to a new adventure as co-chairman and co-CEO of DC Studios.

'Maybe it's a bit more emotional than previous films, but fittingly so,' Pratt tells *Total Film*. 'The movie, and the tone of the movie, has matured along with its original audience. As they've matured, so too has the tone of this film.'



*Vol. 3* brings fresh threats for Nebula, Mantis and Drax (main image), Gamora (top right), Rocket (right) and Cosmo (bottom right)

## SENSE OF AN ENDING

Bringing this iteration of the team to a close.

**JAMES GUNN (writer/director)** It's not about furthering the big MCU story. It's about the *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and ending that story. But to do that in a way that is respectful to all of the characters; to do that in a way that is truly fulfilling; to do that in a way that is emotional; and to do that in a way that is true? To check all those boxes is difficult.

**CHRIS PRATT (Peter 'Star-Lord' Quill)** It really does [feel like a conclusion]. Certainly this is the grand finale, and all the emotions that accompany that are right there: grateful, joyful, and a little sad, but also looking back and reflecting and celebrating. It's the turning of a page. I feel like we are seniors who are entering a summer vacation.

**ZOE SALDANA (Gamora)** It felt like [a conclusion] from when we were shooting it.

But I always think that a conclusion or finale always depends on the audience.

**KAREN GILLAN (Nebula)** It's just the gift that keeps on giving, because I really didn't think it was going to last as long as it has.

I was under the impression I was signing up for eight days of filming on the first film. And then it just gradually kept getting extended. And here we are, nine or 10 years later.

**POM KLEMENTIEFF (Mantis)** There's a bittersweet taste to it, of course, because it's such a beautiful journey that we've had with James, and I'm so grateful for him. It's the end of the trilogy as he imagined it, because he planned everything years ago. So it's beautiful and emotional and sad at the same time.

**GILLAN** I already loved the character so much, but now I've just gotten to spend so much time with her. I've gotten to kind of peel back all the layers, and explore all of the depth of her trauma through multiple movies.





**GILLAN** Vol. 3 is going to continue that funny tone. However, it's going to pack an emotional punch, which the others have, too, but this is going to pack a really strong one, because it's the end of an era. The film is the end of the Guardians as we know them.

**PRATT** [Quill's] really struggling to move on [from losing the original iteration of Gamora]. That's really what leaves the whole Guardians family vulnerable to an attack. In order to protect one of his own, Quill must face the music and make up for his mistakes.

**SALDAÑA** [This Gamora's] not a Guardian. She doesn't remember them. They never happened. She never happened for them. It's really hard, I think, for the Guardians to accept that difference, especially Quill and [her sister] Nebula. It was fun – and painful, of course – to play this kind of Gamora.

**GUNN** I knew it was coming before it was done, but [Gamora's sacrifice in *Infinity War* and the introduction of a version of the character from a new timeline] was a twist that I didn't expect, and it ended up being a real gift, as we get to see a really cool Gamora who is much, much different. And we really get to see Nebula and Gamora's roles and dynamic reversed to some degree, and that's a lot of fun.

**GILLAN** [Nebula's] starting to sort of develop a bit more of a light personality. There's a little bit more levity to her, and maybe the sides of her are starting to show through that would have developed had she not been dealing with all of that trauma.

**KLEMENTIEFF** Mantis gained in confidence. She's more responsible, and she's stronger, too. She fights, and there's all these layers to the character as well that is exciting. I'm excited for the world to see it.

## RACCOON AND RUIN

How smart-alec mercenary Rocket became the soul of the franchise.

**PRATT** The entire success of the franchise is hinged on the believability of Rocket as being a real, living, breathing, sentient being. It never would have worked if he was Bugs Bunny. You immediately forget that he's an animated character [in the finished movies].

**KLEMENTIEFF** It's such a heartbreaking story. It's so deep and emotional and beautiful. [Rocket] talks all about traumas that he has to go through. It's really beautiful. I think you're going to be heartbroken.

**GUNN** It's no secret: all the characters of *Guardians* are victims of trauma in different ways. You know, I share that experience as a child growing up. Rocket, in particular, is the biggest outsider of all of them. He is surly, and he is angry – not because he is surly and angry, but because he is a very sensitive individual who is protecting himself. Those are things that I relate to profoundly. And in that way, this is my story. That's what I love about Rocket. I also love raccoons.

## GAME OF TONES

Balancing the threequel's heart, humour and heroes.

**GUNN** Most trilogies centre around one character, and that can be very difficult. When trilogies are normally franchise-type films, and you have to take a character and tell a very specific character story for all three movies, that's a really challenging thing. But a benefit we have with the *Guardians* is that we have multiple characters. Peter Quill's story is told through all three of these films, but it is, in some ways, like he hands off to other characters.

**PRATT** It is emotional, and that's fitting, considering it's the end. But the emotion is tethered to the comedy, and the comedy is tethered to the emotion, just like in every *Guardians of the Galaxy* film. So you're going to laugh out loud, and you'll be moved to tears.





## IN CONVERSATION

### GROOT EXPECTATIONS

His growing pains continue...

**GUNN** This is college-age, fucking gung-ho Groot. He's really excited. He loves his family. He loves Peter, who's like his father to some degree. He's just a much more exuberant, ready-to-go Groot than we've ever seen.

**KLEMENTIEFF** People call him Swolo Groot, right? He's been working out [laughs]. It's always a fun surprise to discover it with characters that are more CGI. There's also another character – I can't talk about it – but it's very, very cute. I'm not going to say it's like Baby Groot, but it's another character. [When] I saw it, I was like, 'Oh! I want to see it exist in real life.' Just to pet it, you know?

### GOLDEN BOY

Introducing Adam Warlock.

**WILL POULTER (Adam Warlock)** It was a relatively lengthy [audition process]. The third and final stage was me flying out to Atlanta and doing a screen test, in a kind of rudimentary version of the costume and the make-up that you see in the film. Basically, I was spray-painted gold from head to toe. I'm kind of blown away to have been offered the role.

**GUNN** Warlock is like he is in the comics, but there's another element in that, because he is taken out of his cocoon so early he's not quite fully an adult. And that makes him a little bit more of a loose cannon in terms of his relationship to the world.

**PRATT** He is an incredibly strong and dangerous being. And he's got that sort of power that makes him a real threat. The Guardians of the Galaxy are this ragtag squad of Hail Mary galaxy defenders. Adam Warlock is a real menace in terms of just what he's capable of doing with his power.

**POULTER** I think this is Adam Warlock in his infancy, having, in many ways, just been born. He's sort of a child in a man's body. He's trying to orient himself in his world... Playing that, allowed me to dip into some comedic and dramatic material.

**GILLAN** [Will's] great. And he's also huge, which is good, because he's joining one of the tallest casts I've ever seen in my life. Normally, actors are smaller than you think they're going to be. On this, everyone's way taller than you'd think [laughs].

**POULTER** One of the best things about doing stuff on a flying rig is that my flying dreams improved dramatically. They've become a lot more realistic.



Chukwudi Iwujia (right) stars as The High Evolutionary – but will it be survival of the fittest for Rocket and Gamora (insets)?







## EVOLUTIONARY LEAP

Meet *Peacemaker* actor Chukwudi Iwuji's peace-threatening baddie.

**PRATT** [Chukwudi's] fricking amazing. It was so fun to watch him work – serious gravity and depravity. He's an awesome, really fun villain.

**GILLAN** As soon as he first did a rehearsal with us as that character, I was like, 'Oh, we've got a thespian in the house.' You can tell that he's classically trained. And the first time he ever shouted as this character, I literally gasped, because he just committed to it 110%.

**GUNN** His performance is so incredible. And he's so eminently watchable. And he's such a complete piece of shit that you despise him. We've tuned into something extra special with the supervillain with Chuk – and it is because of Chuk. It's because he's as fantastic as he is.

## PARTING SHOTS

Saying farewell to this particular bunch of a-holes.

**POULTER** I was really grateful that they welcomed me in for the last ride, and that they were so kind to me during the process. I was potentially a little bit nervous about joining such a tight-knit group [of actors]. But those nerves dissipated as soon as I got on set and met them all.

**GUNN** It feels emotional [coming to the end of this process] because the movie feels very emotional to me. I watch the movie every day. There aren't too many days that I watch the movie and don't get teary-eyed. I love the characters, and I think it was really incredibly important that I give them a proper send-off, and that each of the Guardians characters has a true and full journey.

**PRATT** I don't see any Quill in my immediate future. I think this journey feels complete. I wouldn't want to rule it out, because I've absolutely loved playing the character, and maybe there's more story to tell. But I don't want that statement to give anything away and get into spoiler territory. This is the MCU, so even if people die, they can come back. So I don't want me saying that there's more in the well to reveal anything about the fate of the character or not. But I love playing him.

**SALDAÑA** I think the time has come for me to step down, and for the next generation to come forward. The one thing I would not want is for Gamora to go away. She's been such an impactful character for fans, and especially female fans, and young female fans. I would love for Marvel to figure out a way to find that next generation of actors that can incarnate these characters, and give them this immortality that fans generationally keep coming back to... But me, per se? I mean, I signed up for one, and I got 10 years. Lucky me, man. I have no complaints. And I'm moving on with so much grace and gratitude in my heart.

**KLEMENTIEFF** You know, never say never.



Time is running out for Drax (Dave Bautista), Mantis (Pom Klementieff), Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) and Nebula (Karen Gillan). Left: Will Poulter as Adam Warlock

Maybe there's going to be a continuation of something. But who knows?

**GILLAN** I don't know what the future is for [Nebula]. I just genuinely don't know. I love this character so much, and I feel like there's just an endless amount of things that could be done with her. So, yeah, I would obviously love to explore more, but I don't know if that's going to happen. I'm waiting to see just as much as everyone else [laughs].

**POULTER** I would certainly be excited by that [returning as Warlock]. I really don't know, though, and that's the reality of working in the MCU. There's a great deal of secrecy. You're kept in the dark maybe a little bit more than people realise. But I just hope that I did justice to the character, and the fans approve of it.

## SWITCHING SIDES

Gunn departs the MCU to take up his new executive post at rival DC Studios.

**GUNN** [Kevin Feige, Marvel Studios president] and I both feel the same way: we want the theatrical moviegoing experience to survive. Marvel and DC, far from being two companies that, you know, one succeeds more if the other one loses – that's not the truth. There are not enough movies coming out that they couldn't all theoretically do well. That is what I would like to see, and I know that that is what Kevin would like to see. And that isn't just bullshit on his part, because it's something that he's expressed to me for the past 11 years that we've been working together.

**PRATT** I don't know [if there's a DC character I'd want to play]. I'd be curious to hear what other people think. Maybe.

**SALDAÑA** If [Gunn] were to call, I would have his back any day, because, you know, it would be fun. It's always fun working with him. I think he's going to do something really great there, and I'm excited. I think Warner Bros were really smart to recruit him.

**POULTER** I will say that I'd love to work for James again in any capacity. I really would love to work with him again. I can't think of a DC role off the top of my head. I just feel very grateful to have played Adam, and I hope I get to play him again as soon as possible.

**KLEMENTIEFF** I can't tell you but we've talked about it. I sent him a pitch. I was like, 'What about this?' Nothing is sure at all but it would be fun to... I would like to work with him on anything, you know? We'll see what happens, and how long it will take.

**GILLAN** I always thought that Poison Ivy was really fun. So maybe something like that would be cool. Honestly, if James asked me to play an alien that sits in the background of a shot and doesn't talk, I would say yes [laughs]. Because working with him has been one of the great joys of my career so far.

**GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3**  
OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 MAY.



*My Life In Pictures*

# DARIO

# Argento

Exploding on to the scene in the 1970s with a series of grisly murder mysteries punctuated by killer set-pieces, Dario Argento then made *Suspiria*, a supreme supernatural suspense that is now a fixture on every Greatest Horror Movies Ever Made list. Ahead of a new season at the BFI Southbank, the Italian maestro talks *Total Film* through seven of his most magnificent movies. Be afraid, be very afraid...

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM







### SUSPIRIA 1977

Argento embraces fairy tales and the fantastique with a vivid tale of an American ballet dancer attending a German academy run by witches.

'After *Deep Red* [1975, marking the fourth *giallo* movie Argento had made in five years, starting with his debut *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*], I really wanted to change something. I wanted to give a twist to my storytelling. So I found myself looking at the horror movies that I used to watch when I was in high school in Paris and I used to go to the Cinémathèque Française to see all these antique horror movies with the display of shadows and lights. I really wanted that to be reflected in *Suspiria*. I really wanted the atmosphere, the sorcery and the witches to be reflected in this movie, which I wanted to be completely different from the other ones, but still with a Dario Argento feeling.

'I wanted colours, gore and flamboyance – a magical acid trip. I love things on the border of reality and fantasy – the supernatural. Witches were something special. As a child, I would have liked, maybe one time, to meet a witch. I used to think my headmistress was a witch. It didn't scare me. Witches are interesting...

'The opening set-piece [Jessica Harper's Suzy Bannion takes a hellish taxi ride through a rain-lashed forest to arrive at Freiburg's ballet academy just as an elaborate double murder takes place] was not particularly hard for me to shoot, because I knew I wanted to shoot in the German Black Forest. So I went scouting for locations there. I was looking for the little villages, the little houses. So the set was there. I mean, I didn't have to do anything special to the set because it was naturally there.

'*Suspiria* was successful because it was a fairy tale reinvented. And inside this fairy tale are all the elements of the subconscious, of psychoanalysis and of sex.'

On the ropes: Director Dario Argento and Eva Axén on the set of 1977's *Suspiria*





## THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE 1970

An American in Rome witnesses an attempted murder in an art gallery and sets out to uncover a serial killer who's been preying on women.

'I think my debut looked so fully formed because, before that, I was a cinema critic. I wrote about and watched tons of movies, and I absorbed as much as I could because cinema's always been my passion. So when I was on set, it was very easy for me. I knew exactly what to do because I'd taken inside me all the experiences of watching great movies. I worked with great professionals, including the cinematographer Vittorio Storaro [*The Conformist*, *Apocalypse Now*].

'I did not expect the film to be so well-received because in Italy it started quite low. Then it was a huge success in France, in England and in the United States. It took the people to go and see the movie for me to understand that I had made something special. Not a usual thriller; it was really a personal vision of a thriller, a vision by Dario Argento. My own vision of the *giallo* was totally instinctive. There was nothing planned, no storyboards. It was easy for me because it was natural. It came out of my inspiration and imagination. My vision of the killer [which is repeated throughout Argento's movies] I took from the American movies I used to watch and love. I wanted to pay homage to those [film noir] movies by using the same fundamental elements – the dark gloves, the coat and the hat.

'Critics have said I don't like women, which is completely false, of course. My mother [Elda Luxardo] was a great photographer and she specialised in feminine portraits – common people, but also great actresses like Sophia Loren, like Gina Lollobrigida, like Claudia Cardinale. So I was, of course, surrounded by the elegance and femininity of these women. I adored to work with women. And I have to say thank you to my mother, because in my movies I took a lot of the lessons: how to light a space; how to make any woman beautiful; how to make the expression of her eyes...'



## DEEP RED 1975

A jazz pianist witnesses a murder and teams up with a journalist to track down the serial killer.

'The killer in this movie was traumatised by an event he witnessed as a child. I totally believe that you can have a great impression when you're a kid – you keep it for your entire life. I recall that my father and mother took me when I was four years old to see Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I was so shocked by the scene where the ghost appears that they had to take me out of the theatre. I could not remove this from my head.

'This was my first collaboration with [Italian prog-rock band] Goblin [who famously scored *Suspria*, and also *Tenebrae* and *Phenomena*]. It was pure fortune. I was looking for other bands like Deep Purple, but they were all busy. I wanted to find something new and I met these four guys who'd just come out of the conservatory of music. They were very fresh and they had ideas. We started a very intimate collaboration. I used to shoot in the day and they used to come to my home in the afternoon or the evening. We would discuss scenes and the music score. It was a total exchange of feeling towards the music and we started a collaboration.'





## INFERNO 1980

This nightmare-fuel sequel gives us the New York-based Mother of Darkness after *Suspiria*'s head witch the Mother of Sighs.

'I was studying symbolism, I was studying mystery drawings, mystery paintings, I was studying riddles. That's why the movie is full of riddles. I remember that I was showing the movie at 20th Century Fox with Sherry Lansing, who was the CEO at the time. She was speechless. At the end of the movie, she asked me, "Why did you put all those riddles in the movie and then you don't give any solution. What do you want?" And I said, "I don't want to give any solution. I want

the audience and public to think along with me. I want to take them on a trip with me."

'The underwater sequence near the start of the film [an iconic set-piece in which a character drops her keys into a submerged ballroom and dives down to fetch them, only for a rotting body to float into view] was difficult to shoot. To cast the actor, I went to Los Angeles and I did interviews with actresses. The first question was: "Are you able to swim? Are you able to dive?" Ninety per

cent of them were "So-so" until an actress came who was a US swim champion [Irene Miracle]. She could also dive. She was mesmerising and she was acting under the water very naturally. The pool was inside a studio. I'm very, very happy. It was an incredibly difficult situation, so I'm incredibly grateful for all the hard work that she did to make the scene possible.

'I consider *Inferno* to be one of my best movies.'



**TENEBRAE** 1982

While touring in Rome, a best-selling US horror author is plagued by a killer who's copycatting murders from his new book.

'It was a very difficult movie to shoot because I didn't want to give any colour. There are no blues, no reds. The palette I used is mainly beige. Why? I wanted this suspended atmosphere and I used a natural location called EUR, which is an area of Rome. I'd shoot there in the morning light and in the night light, just to get inspiration from great symbolic painters like [Giorgio de] Chirico, who sat in the same place. His paintings have a strange, deformed reality, which is the same impression I wanted my movie to look like. I wanted *Tenebrae* to have this metaphysical balance between reality and a dreamy horror movie. I wanted to put the movie "in between". I was aware of the movie being banned in the UK [it was one of the 39 'Video Nasties' that were successfully prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act]. I didn't understand why, because when I was in London I would see the movie theatre packed with people. I was sad at the censorship. Nowadays, I can't imagine what disturbed them so much, to ban part of my movie.'

**PHENOMENA** 1985

A young American girl at a Swiss boarding school uses her ability to communicate with insects to catch a killer.

'What inspired me, what gave me a glimpse for this story, was a radio news story in which they said that, in Germany, there was a murderer that was discovered thanks to the help of insects [their hatching cycles within decomposing bodies enabled a time frame to be applied]. So I worked with an entomologist in order to make the movie as real as possible. We didn't train the insects at all [for scenes in which the girl with powers, played by Jennifer Connelly, communicates with them]. They just did it and I was very quick to take the shot when they were doing what I wanted. We did train the chimpanzee [who acts as nurse and helper to Donald Pleasence's insect expert]. The chimpanzee was very intelligent. We'd say, "You have to do this, this, and that." And he would nod his head. You'd get the impression that he really understood. It's really incredible: chimpanzees are sometimes better than humans.'

**OPERA** 1987

An opera singer is captured by a deranged fan/serial killer and has her eyes pinned open to witness his gruesome killings.

'I came up with the idea of the pins keeping the eyes open as I didn't like it when people closed their eyes at the scary bits in my films! It's true.

'Opera has many visual flourishes, like the crow's-eye view as it swoops around the opera house, and the bullet being fired through a spy-hole in the door. I really love the movement of the camera. I learned this from the set of Sergio Leone, when I was a writer on *Once upon a Time in the West* [1968]. I was looking at how he moved the camera. I realised that this was the most important part of the movie for me, to give this kind of aspect. In *Tenebrae*, there is an incredible scene where the camera turns all around the house [including up and over the roof]. I have fun and I think it's really the movement of the camera that makes the difference in my movies. I feel very free to move it wherever I want to move it and to give the right impression to the public.'



**DARIO ARGENTO: DOORS INTO DARKNESS IS AT BFI SOUTHBANK FROM 1-30 MAY; SELECTED FILMS ARE AVAILABLE ON BFI PLAYER**



A woman with dark hair and bangs stands in a dark, textured room. She is wearing a denim jacket over a dark shirt and dark pants. The floor is covered with many lit candles, creating a warm, orange glow. The word 'dark' is written in a stylized, white, hand-drawn font to the left of the woman.

# dark

ROB SAVAGE DIRECTED THE SCARIEST HORROR MOVIE IN YEARS WITH LOCKDOWN SMASH HOST, AND NOW HE'S MAKING HIS STUDIO DEBUT WITH AN ADAPTATION OF STEPHEN KING'S **THE BOOGEYMAN**. SAVAGE, LIKE THE TITLE MONSTER, THRIVES ON DARKNESS. BUT HOW DID HE SEE HIS WAY TO SHAPING A SHORT STORY INTO ONE OF THE YEAR'S MOST ANTICIPATED HORROR FEATURES?

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM



# matters





**B**ack in the 1980s, at the height of Stephen King's popularity, reviewers used to joke that the bestselling horror author could publish his laundry list and people would buy it. Hell, Stephen King used to joke that he could publish his laundry list and people would buy it.

You could also bet that said bill of items would then be turned into a movie – all of the major horror directors (Romero, Carpenter, Cronenberg) were turning their hands to adaptations – and, it seemed, everyone else was too, from Stanley Kubrick and Rob Reiner, who were expert filmmakers, to Fritz Kiersch and Paul Michael Glaser, who were not. Such was the scrabble that even King's short stories were being optioned for features.

And yet *The Boogeyman* – first published in the March edition of *Cavalier* magazine in 1973, and then rounded up in 1978's collection of King's short fiction, *Night Shift* – remained untouched. OK, so it was turned into a 28-minute short by Jeff Schiro in 1982, but the obligatory feature was not forthcoming. And for good reason: just 15 pages long, *The Boogeyman* comprises a conversation between agitated patient Lester Billings and disinterested therapist Dr Harper, with the former telling the latter of how a closet-dwelling monster killed each of his three children in turn.

## UNADAPTABLE, RIGHT? WRONG.

'The short story is the inciting incident,' says director Rob Savage, who read the story as a kid and was duly freaked out by it. 'It's retained within the movie almost like a short film in itself. So the Lester Billings character initiates the horror, bringing the demonic force into the characters' home and setting off our movie. We knew that scene had to be special, and it was literally tingles on the set when we played through the first rehearsal.'

Savage was alerted to the project by an email pinging in his inbox. A screenplay had been written by Scott Beck and Bryan Woods, and production company 21 Laps Entertainment was now looking for someone to take the project forward. Savage, who was hot property after his found-footage movies *Dashcam* (2021) and, especially, *Host* (2020) had scared up serious attention, loved that Beck and Woods' script faithfully reproduced the short story to kick things off, but wanted to take what follows in a different direction. He worked with screenwriter Mark Heyman (*Black Swan*, *The Skeleton Twins*) to do just that.

'It's really a story about a family experiencing grief and trying to overcome that,' says Savage, explaining that Will Harper has lost his wife, leaving him to raise his two daughters alone. 'Will's struggling with his own emotions while still taking on the burdens of his clientele, and working as a therapist within the family home. Then Lester Billings [played by David Dastmalchian] comes and the Boogeyman finds that this grieving, fractured family is the perfect nesting ground for its evil.'

Savage thinks of his new film as a haunted house movie. But being a filmaholic, he drops other references too, ranging from Polish master Krzysztof Kieślowski to Italian gore guru Lucio Fulci. He offers a quiet smile. 'One of my references was [Robert Redford's 1980 drama] *Ordinary People*. That was my pitch to the studio: "It's *Poltergeist* meets *Ordinary People*." *Poltergeist* is maybe a bit zany as a reference, but that's true to the experience I wanted to give the audience. I wanted the character-drama to feel meaty and complicated and not at all Hollywood, but I also wanted the film to be a fun, scary, rollercoaster horror. I think we found a really lovely balance.'



Sisters Sadie (Sophie Thatcher) and Sawyer (Vivien Lyra Blair) realise they might not be alone...

## DARKNESS FALLS

Playing psychiatrist Will Harper is Chris Messina, a terrific actor of 25 years' experience who's elevated such movies as *Greenberg*, *Argo* and the just-released *Air*, but has rarely been afforded a lead like this to sink his teeth into. A big fan of Stephen King who prefers the author's 'psychological' stories to outright horror tales – he namechecks *The Dead Zone*, *Misery*, *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile* as his favourites – he was sold on Savage's *Ordinary People* pitch, and on the nature of the beast that the Harper family is facing.

'Will's trying to pick up the pieces of his life and rise to the occasion to be the best father he can be, but he's completely lost and stuck,' says Messina. 'The monster brings him together. Maybe the monster was exactly what he needed.' He chuckles at the thought. 'What I like about this film is that the horror is internal,' he goes on. 'There's a monster in the closet but a great deal of the monster is in [the family's] veins. I think the monster represents the fears of looking in the dark, looking into the soul to really see what's going on. There's a lot of avoidance. That's what Rob was talking about when he talked about *Ordinary People* – it's "We're doing fine, it's OK," without anyone actually confronting [the problem].'

'I'm always drawn to darker characters,' says Sophie Thatcher, who plays Sadie, the big sister of eight-year-old Sawyer (Vivien Lyra Blair, aka young Leia Organa in *Obi-Wan Kenobi*). She's referring to her role in indie sci-fi drama *Prospect*, and, naturally, her turn as Natalie in *Yellowjackets*. 'Sadie's in this depressive state and is starting to isolate herself and isn't hanging out with her friends any more.'

Savage is adamant that viewers will be blown away by Thatcher's performance in *The Boogeyman*, saying, 'She's completely astonishing; it's a performance of the same intensity as Toni Collette in *Hereditary* and Florence Pugh in





*Midsommar.* Along with Messina, she's the lead of the movie, in almost every scene as she first battles grief and then the monster that's lurking in the darkest corners of the house. And just as Messina at times got unnerved while shooting the movie away from his family, in New Orleans ('Where I was staying, there were strange creaks...'), Thatcher found the intensity and darkness of the role hard to shift.

'For me, it's hard not to take a character home,' she says. 'It lives in you until you finish it. I brought my twin to New Orleans. When I was having a really hard week, I called her and said, "You should come here." Then I brought my other sister. It's very important to me to have family to ground me.' This from a woman who loves horror movies, who was hooked on *28 Days Later* when she was eight and who made all her friends at her ninth birthday party star in a zombie movie shot by her and her twin sister. It seems like the Boogeyman really knows how to hide in the deepest, darkest recesses of the brain.

Savage nods. 'We took the idea of the Boogeyman for being the name for that unspoken primal fear of the dark, fear of the unknown, fear of what's next. I felt there was something potentially iconic to pull out of that. We had this conception of the Boogeyman from very early on, that this is an evil force that's eternal. This was the first thing that was lurking in the darkness when the cavemen were huddled around their campfire. The Boogeyman is the name that you first give it as a child when you realise that the world isn't a safe place.'

And like most of the best monsters, the Boogeyman, promises Savage, will be kept largely off screen, with the darkness providing a blank canvas for the savage brushstrokes of viewers' imaginations. *Jaws* and *Alien* were templates: Savage even timed his monster's appearance each time he

had a new cut of the movie to ensure that its screentime did not exceed that of those particular foes. No spoilers here as to the design of the creature. But Thatcher, who acted opposite a silver ball in showdown scenes, ready for VFX to be added later, knew just what she was up against.

'I'd seen photos,' she says. 'I was really happy with how they did it. It's kind of weird and bizarre. It's not what I expected. It's... I don't know how to say it... *classy*.'

'You really have to have people that you trust,' adds Messina. 'Rob really knows the genre. He knows when he has what he wants and when he doesn't. He would often give me a direction that I wasn't quite sure of when it came out his mouth. And then I would apply it and think, "Oh, that is exactly what this should be." I found myself trusting him. He's exceptionally talented. And you have to trust the whole visual effects team: "Is it too much? Should I be fighting this monster harder, or less?"'

## BIG SCORES

The plan for *The Boogeyman* was for it to stream on Hulu in the US. Until, that is, Savage screened a first cut to 350 punters in Orange County. They cheered, they hollered, they screamed the goddamn roof off. The studio execs – who, says Savage, supported him every inch of the way – knew they'd be crazy not to unleash this beast into cinemas.

'It was incredible,' grins Savage. 'I think we knew from the first cut that we had something special, but I remember sitting there at the first test screening and we had animatics and stop-motion animation for the creature [because the VFX were not yet ready], and I was terrified, I didn't want to screen it –

**WE HAD THIS CONCEPTION OF THE BOOGEYMAN FROM EARLY ON, THAT IT'S AN EVIL FORCE THAT'S ETERNAL'**

**ROB SAVAGE**

I thought people would tear it to pieces. But you just felt that it was connecting with the audience from the first five minutes. The opening scene is pretty intense. The shuffling and popcorn rustling stopped and there was just silence. For the first 30 minutes I was in a state of pure terror that they were going to turn on the movie or tune out, but then I just realised that they were in. Every scare was landing, every joke was landing, every character beat was landing. It was just a joy to watch it with them then. We were having a collective experience.'

But the biggest test was still to come. Stephen King had been supportive of the project from its inception – he's a fan of *Host* and *Dashcam*, and when he read the script of *The Boogeyman*, he called it 'terrific' – but showing him a cut is an aptly terrifying experience.

'When the movie tested so well, we decided it was time to get his input, so we rented out his favourite cinema in Maine,' recalls Savage. 'He knows what he doesn't like and if we'd have fucked up his story, he'd have told us. But he sent a lovely almost-essay about how much he enjoyed the movie. And then the next day I wake up and there's an email in my inbox from Steve King and he said he's still thinking about the movie. He said a few more nice things and the nicest thing that he said was, "They'd be fucking stupid to release this on streaming and not in cinemas."'

So in cinemas it is, finding its true home like a monster finds a closet. The Boogeyman is waiting for you in the darkness. Do you dare enter the black and gaze at the face of fear?

**THE BOOGEYMAN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 JUNE.**



Sawyer gets the urge to look under the bed. Never a good idea.



Lester (David Dastmalchian) and therapist Dr Harper (Chris Messina) talk Boogeyman business







# Q *Vision* QUEST



With *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*, Ari Aster established himself as one of the most exciting new voices in cinema. He was just warming up – his extraordinary new film, **BEAU IS AFRAID**, is arguably the most bold and original American film of the last 10 years. Aster explains to *Total Film* just how he made such a personal, ‘out-there’ movie on such a vast scale in an industry averse to taking chances...

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM



# W

riter/director Ari Aster exploded onto the scene at the Sundance Film Festival in 2018, his domestic drama *Hereditary* drawing comparisons to such masters as Stanley Kubrick and Ingmar Bergman even as it pivoted into becoming an occult horror movie, and a truly terrifying one at that. His 2019 follow-up, *Midsommar*, was a sun-drenched folk horror that torched toxic masculinity to the ground. Both films were instant classics. And both exhibited a vision that was personal and uncompromising.

But now Aster is going for broke with *Beau Is Afraid*, a three-hour 'nightmare comedy' that fixes its twitchy eye on paranoid, super-anxious Beau Wassermann (Joaquin Phoenix) as he journeys to his mother's funeral. Already dividing critics between the 'masterpiece' and 'self-indulgent' camps, Aster's third feature veers from discombobulating to discomfiting to outright distressing as it persistently takes unexpected left turns, both narratively and stylistically. A full-bore Freudian nightmare, it's sometimes funny, sometimes messed-up, usually both at once.

'It's very satisfying to finally get *Beau Is Afraid* over the finish line,' smiles Aster, who wrote the first draft of the screenplay more than a decade ago and refused to give up on his crazed vision when it was met with raised eyebrows and closed chequebooks. Instead he made his two horror hits, his way, to put himself in a place where he could command a \$35m budget to realise his cracked dream.

But don't think he's now cashed in all his chips. 'I hope to go for broke with every film,' he says. 'I think that's a pretty good method. It might not be feasible. We'll see. But if it's not, then... I don't know, what's the point? These things are very hard to make and take up a lot of your time, and you never know how long life will last. If you have the opportunity to make a film, that's a very rare and beautiful thing, and you'd better make the most of it.'

Beau is afraid, but Aster isn't. Here he explains the method to his madness...

## DREAM BIG

'I wrote the first version of the *Beau Is Afraid* script probably around 2012. It was a very different film but it was the result of me trying to just make myself laugh, and the spirit of that never really changed with the project. The world of Beau made it so there was nothing that I couldn't throw in, and that made it a very freeing and pleasurable thing.



'There was a period during which I thought this might be my first film. And having just made it now, I don't know what I was thinking! I didn't really understand, I think, the nature of money, and how far it can actually go. Just, like, how many locations there were. I mean, the film would have been a more run-and-done thing [if it had been my debut feature], and I don't know what that would have looked like. But there was immediately no traction on that script. Everybody who read it... I think they thought I was pulling their leg, and were like, "OK, where's the real script?"'

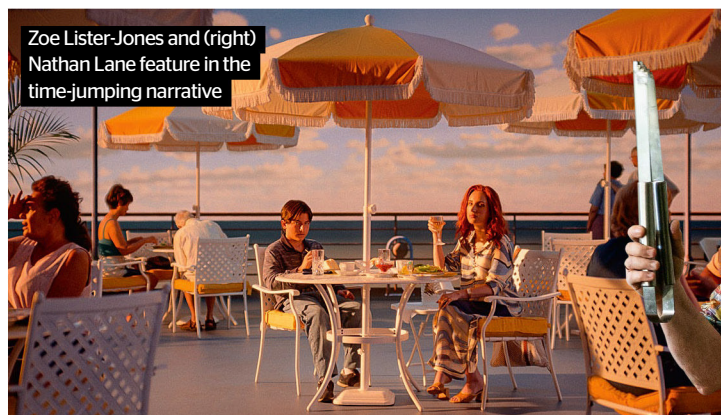
## FIND THE RIGHT HOME

'I made *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* without compromise. If there was a line being toed, it was just that I was meeting the demands of genre, which I'm happy to do because

I love genre. After *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*, *Beau Is Afraid* got traction.

'To their credit, [production company] A24 got *Beau Is Afraid* right away. I was expecting discussions after [they read the script], but the discussions were [only] about the scale and how I saw it, because there were questions about execution and what this would feel like. But for the most part they really understood what it was and were excited by it. There wasn't any arm-twisting needed. The question was a question of budget, because it is *big*.

'And I'm still kind of amazed that they gave me the money to make it, and I'm very grateful they did. It is a three-hour nightmare comedy. Will there be an even longer director's cut down the line, like with *Midsommar*? No, this version feels pretty complete to me. I'm very happy with this cut.'



Zoe Lister-Jones and (right) Nathan Lane feature in the time-jumping narrative





experience is that I did come in with blocking and camera placement in mind, but I never imposed that on Joaquin. And if I ever did... Well, it was always better to keep it to myself. If I ever betrayed that I had an idea, I could really feel this rebellion happening and it was, "OK, now we're going to go way further than what I had planned."

## ANXIOUS TIMES

'I wouldn't have been able to make the film if I didn't have anxiety. A lot of me is in the film.

'Being so confessional only becomes scary when I'm in the edit and realise I'm going to have to put the film out. Writing it and making it, I try to make a point of not getting hung up on the question of "What will the reception be? Will this be too exposing?" But then as it comes closer to release, I do become very anxious. The experience of releasing a film is very queasy-making for me. And also, a film being put out into the world means that it's being marketed, it's being talked about. That always pulls me away from the film because all the words that are used to describe it start to become part of the film's identity. Even the words that I end up using – if I'm trying to be reductive, or if I'm deliberately making a joke, I regret anything I said. The film feels pure to me at a certain point, and almost immediately it gets polluted by the process of it being peddled. Anything I say can only harm the film. Nothing can help it: I mean, as a piece of work. It's worth it if it gets more people to see it, but I want to protect the experience of watching it. It's hard. If I could just have the film come out while I'm lost in some jungle somewhere, that would be the ideal.'

## CALLING DOCTOR FREUD

'Is *Beau Is Afraid* the ultimate Freudian nightmare, or Oedipal comedy? Um... I don't know. Yeah, I wanted to make something elemental in that way, so... I don't know. Yeah. That's as far as I'm going to go with regards to expounding on this. Maybe in 10 years I'll be able to talk about it with more insight. But I do think that the more personal a film is, the more potential it has to be universal. So I'm hoping people will be able to relate to the film.

'I do love a good sex scene. I was just trying

to make myself laugh. But they're very nerve-racking to direct. They're stressful to direct because they're stressful to act in – they're very sensitive and very awkward. All I can say is that I think Joaquin and Parker [Posey] are totally fearless in the sex scene. Especially Parker. She's so funny and so smart. I'll always love her for doing that. And I have to say, I think what Parker does in the film is so wonderful. She's such a brilliant actor.'

## GETTING ANIMATED

'Having an animated segment in the film might be considered another curveball but it was never even a conversation with A24, to their credit, again. I've always wanted to do something in animation because I love animation.

'I worked with these two brilliant Chilean animators who made this film called *La casa lobo*. They were Cristóbal León and Joaquín Cociña, who are also just total mensches – really wonderful people. That was a really joyful experience. I shot-listed and storyboarded the sequence and then came to them and said, "What is the look for this? What is the quality of the animation – how naive is it?" I think in some ways it was hard for them because they're both total artists and I came with this storyboard, with really clear strictures, and they're used to making their own work.

'So it was a very generous thing for them to come on and work with me in this way, and I'm really proud of what they did. And having done it, I'm very interested in going back to animation. It's so much fun.'

## UNDER THE INFLUENCE

'On *Beau*, I was way more inspired by literature than by films. I was thinking about Laurence Sterne and Kafka and the Greeks and Virgil. And at the end I think it moves into Tennessee Williams territory. I was really deliberately staying away from movies as I was thinking about this film. But then, of course, in post-production, movies come to mind, and it's, "Oh, of course this resembles this movie that is so much in my system and I love so much." You metabolise the things you love, and if something feels right to you, you recognise it as right; and when it's time for you to make a decision, without even realising it, you're drawing from that archive.

'I have said before that *Beau Is Afraid* is a "Jewish *Lord of the Rings*, but he's just going to his mom's house". But again, that's an example of how I'd rather be reductive, rather say something stupid that holds no water, than actually try to encapsulate the movie. All those things that I say are really an attempt at making sure the words don't stick to the film.

'But in truth? I really wanted to make something that was funny and sad, and I'm very proud of the film.'

**BEAU IS AFRAID OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 MAY.**

Joaquin Phoenix's troubled Beau faces a journey of discovery (on the way to his mum's house)

## STYLE SERVES STORY

'I didn't come into *Beau* thinking, "OK, I'm going to change my style here." If anything, with every film I'm just sort of applying my own taste and judgement, whatever my own sensibility might be, to whatever the story is. And I know for a fact that I'm learning because every scene I direct I feel there's some small revelation or disappointment that I carry to the next scene.

'I knew when I cast Joaquin [Phoenix] that I couldn't get away with my usual way of working, which is something that I wanted to shake up anyway, which was that I would block out the entire film and shot-list everything before I got to set. I think the reason that I clung to that in the first two films is that I didn't have enough confidence in my ability to pivot. What was really nice about this



Director Aster decided to add animation to the heady mix of *Beau Is Afraid*







# BEAST

**The robots-in-disguise franchise evolves again, with a prequel set in the 90s and featuring the animalistic Maximals alongside other fresh and familiar machines. *Total Film* meets the filmmakers and cast to find out where *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* will sit on the spectrum from *Bumblebee* to *Bayhem*.**

WORDS KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER

# MODE

**T**here's a photograph on the wall behind Lorenzo di Bonaventura. The producer is on Zoom to talk *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* with *Total Film*, but the picture is diverting: 'It's actually Jerry Garcia in a top hat; I bought it because I thought it was so hilarious.' The picture is the perfect fusion of chaos and order: Garcia's band, the Grateful Dead, were poster boys for counterculturalism.

Di Bonaventura has been along for the ride with the *Transformers* since the first live-action film, which hit cinemas in 2007. As the series progressed, you might say it became increasingly anarchic, prioritising spectacle over substance. Then, along came *Bumblebee*, and popped a top hat on the franchise.

'*Bumblebee* was a conscious decision to make a more intimate movie,' says di Bonaventura. Not because they felt the previous five Michael Bay-directed outings were missteps, says the producer, but because they didn't want to overstay their welcome by making a sixth movie that was the same, with 'all the big noise and smashing'. *Bumblebee* is a more character-driven film, with, says *Rise of the Beasts* director Steven Caple Jr., 'heart and softer moments'. There's a little more order to the chaos.

The *Transformers* franchise is perhaps unique: a long-running blockbuster film series that has succeeded in outperforming its box-office peers while underperforming in terms of critical opinion. Collectively, the movies have made more than ➤➤



## MAKING OF

➡ \$4.8bn at the box office – an average per film of \$800m. In fact, *Bumblebee*, the franchise's last film, was an outlier – scoring a hit critically while taking home the least (\$468m) of any entry in the franchise at the box office.

This puts the latest instalment in the series – the seventh – in a fascinating position. *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* has recruited *Creed II*'s acclaimed director, Steven Caple Jr., who picks up after Travis Knight worked his critic-enchancing magic on 2018's *Bumblebee*, and in turn shouldered directing duties post-Bay. Given *Bumblebee*'s quieter, more disciplined approach than its wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am forerunners, and with di Bonaventura stating that *Bumblebee*'s positive reception prompted a fresh look at tone and style, can Caple Jr. deliver a Transformers movie that's a critic- and audience-pleasing marriage of both?

The conditions look promising. Just as with *Creed II*, Caple Jr.'s background as an independent filmmaker meshes with his status as a fan of the franchise. His love of 1996 animated Transformers series *Beast Wars: Transformers*, from which *Rise of the Beasts* borrows mythology – and characters – secured him the job.

## A NEW PERSPECTIVE

'There's the filmmaker side of me that's ready to rock out and do things fresh and new,' says Caple Jr. 'And then there's a part of me that goes, "OK, I saw the 2007 version of this. What did they do right? What can I make sure is sprinkled in this?" I didn't go full 180, let's just say that. You're gonna get a lot of me, I guess. A lot of character, a lot of grit, and some fluidity in terms of making everything make sense. I connect the dots more and do a lot more set-ups for what we can do in the future.'

Di Bonaventura admits it's hard to avoid repetition, but he's buzzed by the response to early test screenings, 'which is: "Wow, you've given us the things we love about Transformers, but you have given us a different experience."'

That different experience, says di Bonaventura, comes from many different directions, 'but the primary thing that's happening is both humans have more agency than they've ever had in any of our movies. And they both have character arcs. At the same time, which we've never done, we have a character arc for Optimus Prime. And those character arcs are in conflict until they're in unity. That's a different experience for a Transformers fan.'

Ah yes, the humans. Let's park Optimus Prime and the film's roll call of exciting new 'bots for now, because the humans are a big part of what makes *Rise of the Beasts* stand out.

'Elena is an artefact researcher, working at this museum,' says Dominique Fishback (*Judas and the Black Messiah*), who plays the character. 'She's stagnant when we meet her, and



Noah (Anthony Ramos) and Elena (Dominique Fishback) in an explosive scene

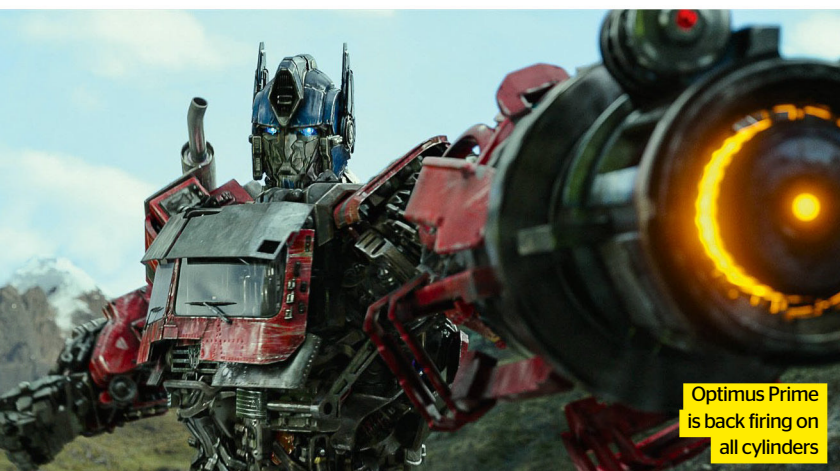
she gets introduced to the world of the Autobots in a really explosive and somewhat traumatising way.'

Elena meets Anthony Ramos' Noah – an ex-military electronics expert – who's back home in Brooklyn with his family after being dishonourably discharged. The two are thrown into the middle of an adventure that sees Optimus Prime (Peter Cullen) and Bumblebee team up with a new kind of animal-shaped Transformer: the Maximals. Cue a battle against antagonists Terrorcons and Predacons.

'We see in the trailer a bit of Noah's introduction, where he's in the car, and the car has hijacked him, but we don't know how Elena gets introduced, and it's really explosive,' promises Fishback. 'I'm excited to see how it all comes together when she meets Noah, when she meets the 'bots.'

Ramos fills us in on Noah's journey. 'Noah is surprised with an introduction to [an Autobot] who becomes his confidant, Mirage, played by Pete Davidson,' says Ramos. 'We start to see that relationship blossom. Mirage changes his life, but that doesn't start off so smoothly, and it doesn't even really end smoothly. But we start to see how they're changing each other.'

Mirage, says Caple Jr., is a contrast to Optimus Prime, and to chief Maximal, Optimus Primal (Ron Perlman) – a gorilla-shaped Transformer who originated in *Beast Wars*.



Optimus Prime is back firing on all cylinders



Autobot Mirage with his new friend Noah



## TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS



'Mirage is an outcast,' says the director. 'He's a rebel. And when everyone falls in line with Optimus Prime, he's always looking left or right to see: is there another direction or another way to take this? He is the comedic relief but also the heart of the film and [key to] connecting to the robots. He sees something in humans that Optimus Prime and the other Autobots don't see yet.'

The film is set seven years after *Bumblebee*, in 1994, before the events of the Bay movies. Which means Optimus Prime and the other Autobots aren't quite at the comfort levels they've reached with humanity by the time they strike up a relationship with Shia LaBeouf.

'These guys are getting used to our culture and who we are as a people,' says Caple Jr. 'Mirage has fully accepted that; that's what makes him fun. And you see him use so many pop-culture references from the 90s because he appreciates humans and who they are. I think audiences are really gonna dig what we put into him beyond just the design of him.'

Mirage takes the form of a classic 90s Porsche 911 Carrera – one of the distinctly 1990s touches Caple Jr. included in the painstaking recreation of the era. 'We just wanted to make sure every detail was right,' says the director. 'To the watches and the Sergio [Tacchini]. Those brands were tough to find.'

PARAMOUNT PICTURES, HASBRO, TRANSFORMERS AND ALL RELATED CHARACTERS ARE TRADEMARKS OF HASBRO



The human characters have more agency in this film, says the producer

But why set it in the 1990s, particularly if, as di Bonaventura says, it's not strictly a sequel to *Bumblebee*? It's partly because *Beast Wars* came out then, but also because audiences loved the period 1980s music and general throwback feel of *Bumblebee*.

'We've captured a really cool, unique era [in] the 90s [specifically, 1994], which I don't think we get to see too often in film,' says Caple Jr. 'And I know we've never been there with Transformers before.'

The 1990s also afforded them some creative freedom. 'If you set it any time after Michael Bay's movies, you're forced into one reality,' says di Bonaventura. 'It's not easy to juggle the lore of the Bay movies, and then somehow insert this other piece of it. Eventually, if we're lucky enough to get there, we're going to be forced to marry them. But for the moment, we don't have to.'

This creative freedom presented the opportunity to introduce the *Beast Wars* characters: Maximals, Terrorcons and Predacons.

'The Autobot slogan is "Till all are one". It felt like [overall] we were always watching movies with Autobots versus Decepticons, and this film really captures the true essence of what "Till all are one" means,' explains Caple Jr. 'The only way to get there is if you feel some separation and division and I think the audience is really going to dig how we have each faction staying true to their own code. Coming in, everyone's guard is up a little bit. We don't know who's who. There's a little bit of tension there that feels natural and we can gradually grow into the franchise and what else we have out there in terms of the world [beyond]. There's so much more, especially if we take a look beyond Earth.'

The film's main villains, the Terrorcons, he says, are 'ruthless' – especially the trophy-hunting Scourge, voiced by Peter

**'WE JUST WANTED TO  
MAKE SURE EVERY  
DETAIL WAS RIGHT'**

**STEVEN CAPLE JR.**

Dinklage. 'I like to pour a lot into the villains. I like to make them layered and dimensional,' says Caple Jr. Di Bonaventura describes Scourge as a nightmare: 'He really has no purpose in life other than destruction.'

Aside from Optimus Primal, a noble leader like Prime, Maximals in the film include Rhinox, Cheetor, and the Michelle Yeoh-voiced Airazor ('You get to see Airazor setting museums on fire,' says Ramos, excitedly). Airazor, says di Bonaventura, 'is the first Maximal that we encounter in the movie and, in a way, is the bridge between the two groups'. As for their natural enemies, the Predacons are being kept a little more under wraps, although di Bonaventura does reveal that we'll meet Scorponok.

Other inclusions? Autobots Arcee, Wheeljack and Stratosphere, and Terrorcons Transit, Battletrap and Nightbird. Locations, too, are noteworthy – as well as Iceland, Canada and New York, they also shot in Peru. But Caple Jr. still has some surprises up his sleeve: there are two more 'entities', he says, that haven't yet been revealed and that he's excited for people to see.

Speaking to Caple Jr. six days into him becoming a father for the first time, it's surprising to see his passion for both the larger franchise and his own film as fizzy as it is, given that he's barely had any sleep. But it's not hard to see he's proud of what he's created. He clearly believes *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* is a bundle of joy that audiences will embrace.

**TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE BEASTS  
OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 JUNE.**



INTERVIEW JAMES MOTTRAM

‘IT TOOK A VERY  
ORIGINAL THINKER  
TO THINK OF ME FOR  
CERTAIN PARTS.’

# SIGOURNEY WEAVER

From *Alien* to *Avatar*, Sigourney Weaver has redefined the way we see women on screen in her 40-year-plus career. At 73, she continues to shock and surprise, as her sexually confident socialite in Paul Schrader’s latest, *Master Gardener*, proves. *Total Film* meets one of the most daring, diverse talents in the business.

PORTRAITS MARK SELIGER

AUGUST/MARK SELIGER







# W

hen Sigourney Weaver strides into the Hollywood Celebrities Lounge at the Venice Film Festival, there's no ceremonial entrance. She may have been on our screens for well over four decades, but she's learnt how to separate the glitz from the grit of real life. 'I'm just another goofy person trying to get along,' she says. The red-carpet mania that's just a few feet away? 'I feel quite divorced from it. I feel like that's over there. My life is over here.'

Wearing a peach blouse, beige slacks and white flats, gold earrings decorating her very recognisable face, the 73-year-old Weaver may be utterly down-to-earth, but there's no escaping that career of hers. Breaking through in Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi classic *Alien* as Ellen Ripley – a role she replayed three more times, gaining a first Oscar nomination for James Cameron's 1986 sequel, *Aliens* – she almost single-handedly changed the way we thought about action heroines.

Yet Ripley is just a fraction of the output for this New York-born star. The daughter of a TV executive, she studied at Stanford and Yale School

of Drama and ruled the 80s box office in comic blockbuster *Ghostbusters* and its 1989 sequel, playing Bill Murray's obsession, Dana Barrett. In between, she stretched her dramatic muscles as real-life primatologist Dian Fossey in *Gorillas in the Mist* and corporate ball-buster Katharine Parker in *Working Girl* – scoring two further Oscar nods.

She was in her early 40s when she returned to Ripley – with an unforgettable shaven cranium – for 1992's David Fincher misfire *Alien³*. It sparked a fruitful period where she defied the cliché that middle-aged actresses are expendable, working for Roman Polanski (*Death and the Maiden*), Ridley Scott (twice more, in 1492: *Conquest of Paradise* and *Exodus: Gods and Kings*), Ang Lee (*The Ice Storm*), M. Night Shyamalan (*The Village*) and not forgetting James Cameron (*Avatar*).

She can now add legendary *Taxi Driver* scribe Paul Schrader to that list. His latest, *Master Gardener*, sees Weaver play Norma Haverhill, a well-to-do Republican who employs reformed neo-Nazi Narvel (Joel Edgerton) as her head gardener – and gatekeeper of her grand-niece (Quintessa Swindell). Forthright and frank, especially when it comes to sex, Norma marks a radical turn for Weaver – a multi-layered grande dame with a taste for power, control and shock value.

Adding yet another indelible portrait to her roster, it caps a hugely busy period for Weaver, following roles in abortion drama *Call Jane*, alcoholism tale *The Good House* with her old friend Kevin Kline, and of course Cameron's \$2.3bn-grossing sequel *Avatar: The Way of Water* – in which she got to find her inner child, playing (via performance-

capture) the 14-year-old daughter of her original character, Dr. Grace Augustine. Retirement? Not a chance.

She's currently shooting Scott Derrickson's action love story *The Gorge*, with Anya Taylor-Joy, in the UK – the only downside being it pulls her away from her family life (married since 1984 to stage director Jim Simpson, they have one grown-up daughter, Charlotte). This aside, she couldn't be happier. 'I love what I do,' she smiles. 'I feel like I'm much more confident. I fret less. I just sort of prepare and I show up and I let it go.'

## It's your first time working with writer-director Paul Schrader. Was he a bucket-list person for you?

I think part of it was just... I always admired his work. But he didn't write that many parts for women. So I didn't really put him on my bucket list. I wanted to be realistic. So I was delighted. And he'd written this script with these two great women's parts [Norma and her grand-niece]. Very red-blooded sexual women, even this woman of an older age. And I thought it was great. So it just all fell into place so quickly.

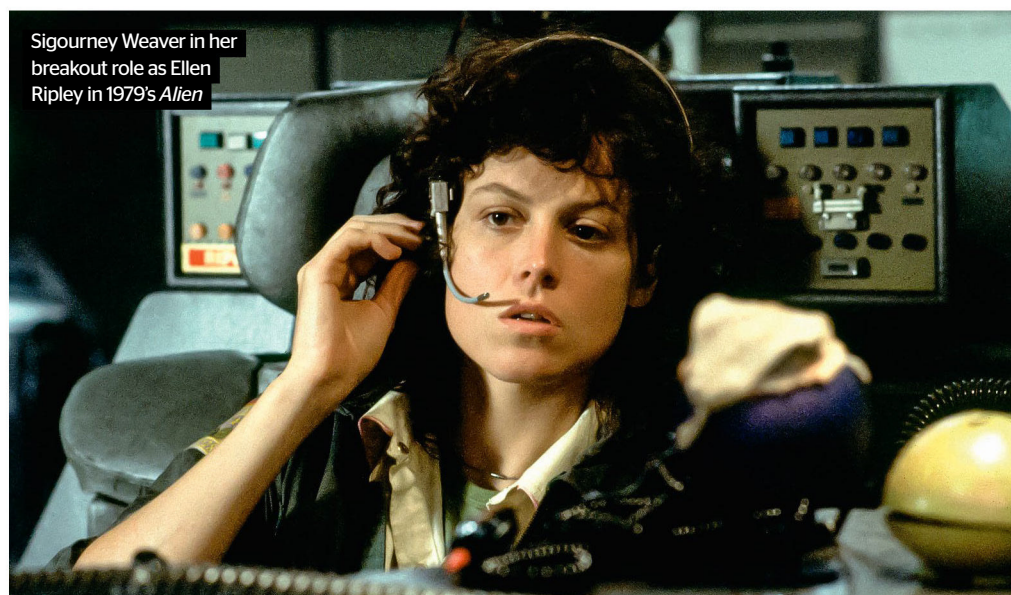
## How did you feel about Norma?

I responded to Norma right away... It reminded me of Virginia Woolf. Things go off the rails, and it's like opening Pandora's box, I think. She seems very contained, but she ends up being like a cauldron and I've never played anyone like that. I've sort of avoided women like that, because usually they're clichés, and he wrote someone I felt was very real. Who was very hurt. And, yes, quite dangerous. Like any woman would be!

## She has this fascination with Narvel's background. Is she outright racist?

Yeah. I don't think she realises what a racist is. I think she would say she's a Republican. We were put here in this country to run it! She's intrigued by that. I think she probably, frankly, looks down on those people. And I think that the white supremacists... they're violent. She considered that racist. I don't think these racists think of themselves as racist. She considers them racist.

I think Norma has always gone her own way. She's very curious about things. She's not afraid. And I think she's fascinated by Narvel's past. She doesn't always look at it. But every now and then, it turns her on to realise who this man is, because of course, it's deceptive. She sees him every day. He's a gardener. And we're



Sigourney Weaver in her breakout role as Ellen Ripley in 1979's *Alien*





With Joel Edgerton in the upcoming *Master Gardener*, written and directed by Paul Schrader

kind of partners. And in certain situations, it arouses her to see that he's from this other planet. I mean, he's really a foreign kind of creature.

**Do you think Norma Haverhill is anything like your character Katharine Parker in *Working Girl*, who was similarly forthright?**

I just think of Norma as completely unique. In my experience, she's this woman of great aristocratic privilege. I've been around a few of those women. But in fact, the women I based Norma on were two older women who became good friends of mine – and who are artists. I wanted Norma to feel normal for a long time until these things go wrong. I consider her a very vulnerable person. Even though she thinks she has control it's very limited, and she finds that out.

So to me, she's not really like Katharine Parker. Katharine Parker is a mover and a shaker. And she's like all those people in mergers and acquisition. They're all as unethical as... I don't think Norma is unethical, although she

does bad things. And she says terrible things. I think she's struggling for her own survival at that point. It's kind of terrifying to say some of these things.

**It's been a busy time for you, with this film, *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Call Jane* and *The Good House* with Kevin Kline. How did that make you feel?**

I'm just like, 'Wow!' I got to play four such different women and all in good projects. And all women it was kind of a pleasure to hang out with. I've made them over the years, of course. It looks like I threw some magic beans out the window and the next day I had four beanstalks!

**How important was it for you to do *Call Jane*, which dealt with illegal abortions in 1960s America? It came shortly after the American Supreme Court repealed the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling that protected a woman's right to an abortion...**

The attraction, I think, for all of us was that we felt passionately that we wanted to tell this story to a country that had

kind of gotten to depend on *Roe v. Wade* – as a law that would give women more freedom. [My co-star] Elizabeth Banks felt that *Roe* might be reversed. I did not see it coming in the same way. And I think what was wonderful about *Call Jane* was we all came together – Robbie Brenner, our producer, and Phyllis [Nagy, director] and Elizabeth, our whole ensemble... It took a lot of work. But we all came together very spontaneously and passionately to tell this story about this group of very capable, down-to-earth, caring women who responded to this emergency in healthcare by forming this clandestine organisation to support women, and provide them with safe, illegal abortion.

**Have you always spoken out on social issues? Were you worried about being seen as pontificating?**

I'm too old to worry about that. I'm not pontificating. You ask me what I think, I'm going to tell you. I'm not going to be coy. I'm very uncomfortable with the idea of anyone particularly listening to me because I'm a celebrity but... I know my experiences. And I'm a New Yorker. I'm a US citizen. So I have my own feelings about what's [what]. ➡

**‘YOU ASK ME  
WHAT I THINK,  
I’M GOING TO  
TELL YOU’**



➡➡ **What about *The Good House*? It was another film with Kevin Kline, who you did *Dave* and *The Ice Storm* with...**

It's one of my favourite things that I've ever gotten to do. He's marvellous in it. It's about a woman who drinks. Who thinks it's fine to drink, thank you very much! It's her business. But she's living in this world. She's been in rehab; her children sent her to rehab against her will. And she waits. She works so hard, takes care of everybody. And then at the end of the day, gets home and unhooks her bra and puts her feet up and opens a bottle of Pinot Noir that she's not supposed to have and talks to her dogs. Now, who can begrudge this woman that? Certainly not me.

**Looking back, you started in theatre on *The Constant Wife* in 1975. What do you remember?**

Ingrid Bergman was the star. Sir John Gielgud was directing...

**That's quite a line-up. How was Ingrid Bergman to work with as a co-star? Did you ask her for advice?**

What was nice about Ingrid was she never took herself seriously but I wouldn't have asked for advice from her. She was too important... [but] she was so gracious, so professional, so talented, so generous. And I could have worked with some sort of monster and I'm not even sure that I would have stayed in the business if that were so, but instead I worked for this glorious person. So I learned so much just being around her.

**Have you ever taken heed of advice from older actors?**

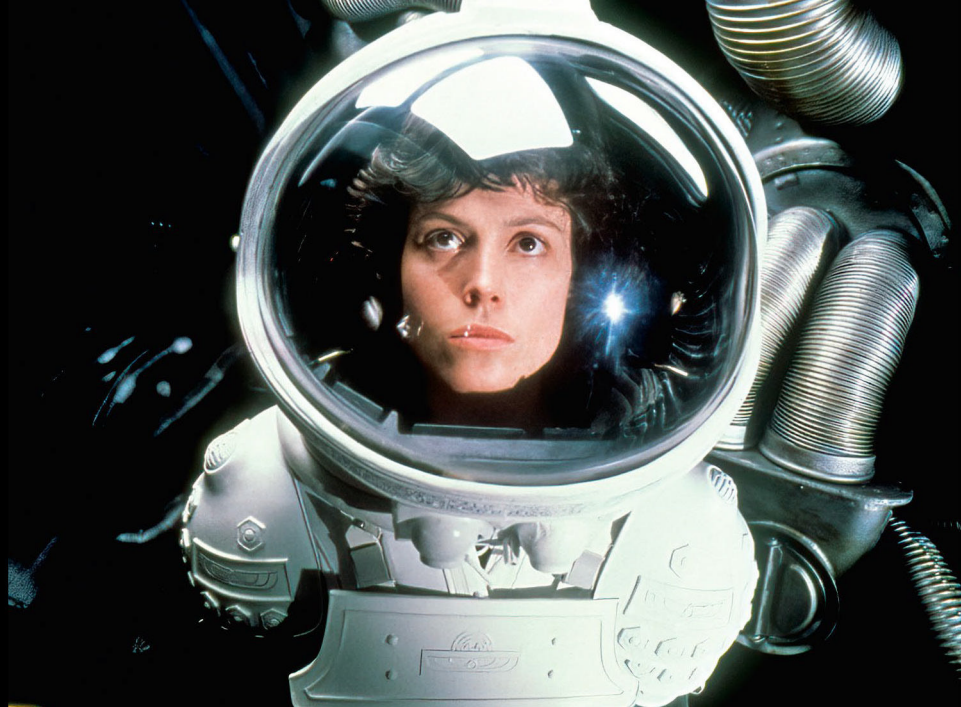
One time [in 1987] I was doing *The Merchant of Venice*. John Seitz playing Shylock. He was so good. And he said, 'I just tried to get out of the character's way.' And I think that's very true. You get yourself out of the way so the character can kind of take over and I do think I do try to [do that].

**So you try to 'empty' yourself before you start playing a role?**

No. I don't think you can get empty but you can sort of take your head out of it so everything else can be at the service of this other entity. And it does happen. I'm not quite sure how. I find it hard to explain, but I think it's really about getting out of your own way.

**Your first screen role was a bit-part in Woody Allen's 1977 film *Annie Hall*. How did that happen?**

I actually auditioned for the part of the girlfriend – the girl that he's at the beach



## FIVE STAR TURNS

### ALIEN SERIES 1979-1997

In Ellen Ripley, Weaver fashioned the most iconic female protagonist in sci-fi cinema, challenging gender roles and Academy bias. Her Oscar nom for *Aliens* was a game changer. 'It was a *huge* surprise,' she said.

### GHOSTBUSTERS SERIES 1984-2021

Weaver's cellist Dana Barrett was beset by evil, first possessed by the demon Zuul in *Ghostbusters* and then targeted by the spirit of Vigo the Carpathian in the sequel. 'The script just enchanted me,' she said.

### GORILLAS IN THE MIST 1988

Weaver scored two Oscar noms in 1989: Best Supporting Actress for *Working Girl* and Best Actress for this immersive take on primatologist Dian Fossey. Weaver later became honorary chairperson of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

### GALAXY QUEST 1999

As the cast of a *Star Trek*-like show has to defend Earth for real, the (Alien) Queen of Sci-Fi affectionately satirised the genre. 'I had to fight for *Galaxy Quest*,' she revealed. 'No one thought I would do it.'

### AVATAR 2009

Weaver re-teamed with James Cameron to play Dr. Grace Augustine. In the sequel, she played Augustine's daughter, Kiri. 'I mean, no one was asking John Wayne in his 70s to play a 14-year-old. It's incredible technology.' **JG**





***‘AFTER ALIEN  
PEOPLE DIDN’T  
KNOW WHAT TO  
DO WITH ME’***

other women of action. Just think of the pioneer days in the Wild West. Women were left on their ranches and had to use a shotgun and build a sod house and do thousands of things. So certainly not the first... but maybe in movies. American movies, anyway.

You know what's interesting is that people come up and talk to me like all I've ever done is *Gorillas in the Mist* or all I've ever done is *Alien* or all I've ever done is independent movies. It depends on what pocket the theatregoer is in.

### Was it easy to get roles?

I think after *Alien* people didn't quite know what to do with me. And I was very much a comedienne. And certainly, I think that I've done quite a few comedies, but can never do enough, because it's really my favourite thing. But love stories... When I was coming up, certainly I would tower over most producers. And when they thought

**How did that make you feel?**

What are you going to do? It always took a very original kind of thinker to think of me for certain

parts. I don't think it was ever very logical. People would suddenly go 'Oh, Sigourney Weaver!' And put me in a part. I was always, I think, an odd choice. Maybe.

Oh, yes, I know. I know. I was never a sex object.

**After your final time as Ripley in *Alien: Resurrection* and before you made the first *Avatar*, you went through a period of several independent films, like *Imaginary Heroes*. Was that where your heart really was?**

I just looked for interesting stories. And in my case the interesting stories [were] small, independent films, which I think is a way of working that I really liked because I started off on off-off Broadway. And so we were always working in a kind of illegitimate space. And so I'm very comfortable with that. I think it's hard to find a good story. A lot of the women in some of the bigger pictures are somewhat caricatured.

|||||

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# 100



**\$2.923 BN**



The number of films  
in which she has starred  
as Ellen Ripley





➤➤ Among them, you played an autistic woman called Linda in *Snow Cake*, opposite Alan Rickman. At the time, it was probably the first major movie since *Rain Man* to tackle the condition with any real clarity...

I looked at *Rain Man* right at the end after I'd done all my research and I think it's a really fine film. I kept meeting people on the spectrum who were very glad they made the movie and Dustin [Hoffman] did a very good job, but people do get sick of having their condition summed up by one story, and I think that there was great impatience for there to be other interpretations.

**What about Douglas McGrath's Truman Capote story, *Infamous*? You were brilliant as Babe Paley, but it was rather dwarfed by *Capote*, the other film version around at the time...**

I have to say that *Infamous* is a wonderful movie. It's so funny and Toby Jones is just so brilliant. If the other one was like a shot of bourbon or something, this was a glass of champagne. Just a delightful, very moving film about the cost of being a writer, what it takes out of you.

**How was it going back to *Avatar*, reuniting with James Cameron? When did you start shooting *The Way of Water*?**

Well, let's see: 2017 we started and I finished in early October 2018. We shot most of the performance capture in LA and he gave me this wonderful part of this 14-year-old girl because he said, 'You're immature. You are 14. I know you can do this.' And I said, 'If I'm 14, you're 16!' So that's been a great adventure.

***Avatar's* cutting-edge technology eschews green-screen shooting – which you've never really done.**

**Are you happier that way?**

I think, acting in front of a green screen with a pretend monster... when I see those movies, I always feel the creature's much too close. It doesn't look real to me. So I think those challenges are very difficult for actors. But so far, I really haven't experienced that.

**Is it fun to revisit old characters?**

**You did it with Dana Barrett in**

***Ghostbusters: Afterlife* in 2021...**

It was. It's always fun to see the guys again. And I thought that Jason [Reitman] did such a wonderful job. I love the movie. I think the kids are so good in it. And I'm just very glad that Jason got to work with Ivan Reitman for that. However long that took before we lost him.



**You also played yourself in an episode of *Call My Agent!* How did that come about?**

I have been a fan since I was told about it by a French friend. I never dreamed that I would be in it. It was probably a secret wish, but I never mentioned it to anyone except maybe my husband. And so I was very surprised to get this script when I was shooting a film in Nova Scotia with an offer and a script about me. But it was the first time in my life that, without reading the script, I just said ‘Yes’ right away. And I’m very glad I did. Because I had such a sublime experience with these superb actors and a wonderful team. It was the most fun thing I’ve ever done. And of course, to be in Paris, speaking French, in a French team, I just felt so fortunate. It was really a dream come true.

**What’s your relationship like with your reps? Can you be over-protected as you become successful as an actor?**

Probably I don’t have an accurate picture because if you don’t have agents screening things, you can be sent lots of strange things that probably should never see the light of day. But on the other hand, I sometimes meet people and they say, ‘Well I sent you the script...’ and I would never have gotten it. So I think it is difficult. I do think you get a lot of jobs [by word of mouth]. Like I heard about *The Ice Storm* from Kevin Kline. I said, ‘Well, gosh, that sounds good. I’m going to read it.’ I was more enthusiastic than he was in the beginning! So I kind of found my way into that part. But you do need an agent.

**Aside from this, you’ve not done much TV. Why?**

I’ve done a couple of miniseries. I did *Political Animals*. I think the hour-long series are huge commitment. That’s a lot of work. Maybe I’m lazy. I guess I’m used to, in a sense like a play, concentrating on one story at a time. And, on the other hand, I have so many friends doing



With Elizabeth Banks in abortion drama *Call Jane*

these long series and they have the chance to develop relationships and characters in the most wonderful way.

**How do you feel about being an icon now?**

I must look that up! I really don’t know what it means. I’m grateful that my work can resonate with young women. I’m very grateful about that. And I think it is simply because I really can’t imagine playing something I don’t believe in, that I don’t want to see. I’ve done a lot of science fiction, which I think is very relevant. Someone who was pointing out that they have a lot of strong women

in things like *Star Trek*, because that was the only place these guys thought, ‘All right, let’s take a chance and make this woman powerful. See what happens. See if the world survives.’ And so I think science fiction has been a place where a lot of new ground is broken. And even though that was never my goal, I feel so lucky that I got to work in that space.

I think it’s always relevant, because it’s always ahead, lessons to be learned.

**Do you think that women’s roles are different nowadays? At least on screen and in the film industry?**

Yes. I’m an older woman at a good time, because I think filmmakers have noticed that older actors or older women characters bring a lot that the audience appreciates, because a lot of the audiences are older. And there’s so many good, older actresses around.

**This year, Harrison Ford is reprising his Indiana Jones character in his older years. If anyone came up with a good Ellen Ripley story, would you consider it?**

No! There are all kinds of younger actors taking this kind of role. And there was an *Alien* [film] that I really wanted to do with Neill Blomkamp and we didn’t get to do that, but, you know, that ship has sailed, and I’m very happy doing what I’m doing. I put in my time in space!

**‘I’M GRATEFUL THAT MY WORK CAN RESONATE WITH WOMEN’**

**MASTER GARDENER**  
IS IN CINEMAS ON 26 MAY

AUGUST/MARK SELIGER, VERTIGO

||||| SIGOURNEY WEAVER LINE READING |||||

**‘NEVER BURN BRIDGES. TODAY’S JUNIOR PRICK, TOMORROW’S SENIOR PARTNER!’**

**KATHARINE PARKER**  
WORKING GIRL

**‘Get away from her, you bitch!’**

**ELLEN RIPLEY**  
ALIENS

**‘THERE IS NO DANA, THERE IS ONLY ZUUL!’**

**DANA BARRETT/ZUUL**  
GHOSTBUSTERS





EDITED BY  
MATTHEW LEYLAND  
@TOTALFILM\_MATTL



TO DIE FOR



OWNS THE NIGHT



INHERENTLY NICE



IRRATIONAL,  
MAN



C'MON, C'MOFF  
IT



# SCREEN

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE



88

## BEAU IS AFRAID

Aster be seen to  
be believed...

90



92



94



98

## OUT NOW

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Nam June Paik: Moon Is the Oldest TV	★★★	p99
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Little Bone Lodge	★★★	p99
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## ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://gamesradar.com/totalfilm) for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Fast X	19 May
Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.3	3 May

For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

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# BEAU IS AFRAID <sup>15</sup>

Fear and loathing...

★★★★★ OUT 19 MAY CINEMAS

SEE THIS  
IF YOU  
LIKED

## INHERENT VICE 2014

Joaquin Phoenix embraces his comedic side for Paul Thomas Anderson's confounding, but ultimately rewarding, Thomas Pynchon adaptation.

## MIDSOMMAR 2019

Ari Aster considers his bravura second feature a joke that builds to a punchline. Like *Beau*, that doesn't stop it being deeply unsettling.

## THE FATHER 2020

Tonally they're worlds apart, but Florian Zeller's double-Oscar winner and *Beau* both tell their stories from the perspective of mentally ill main characters.

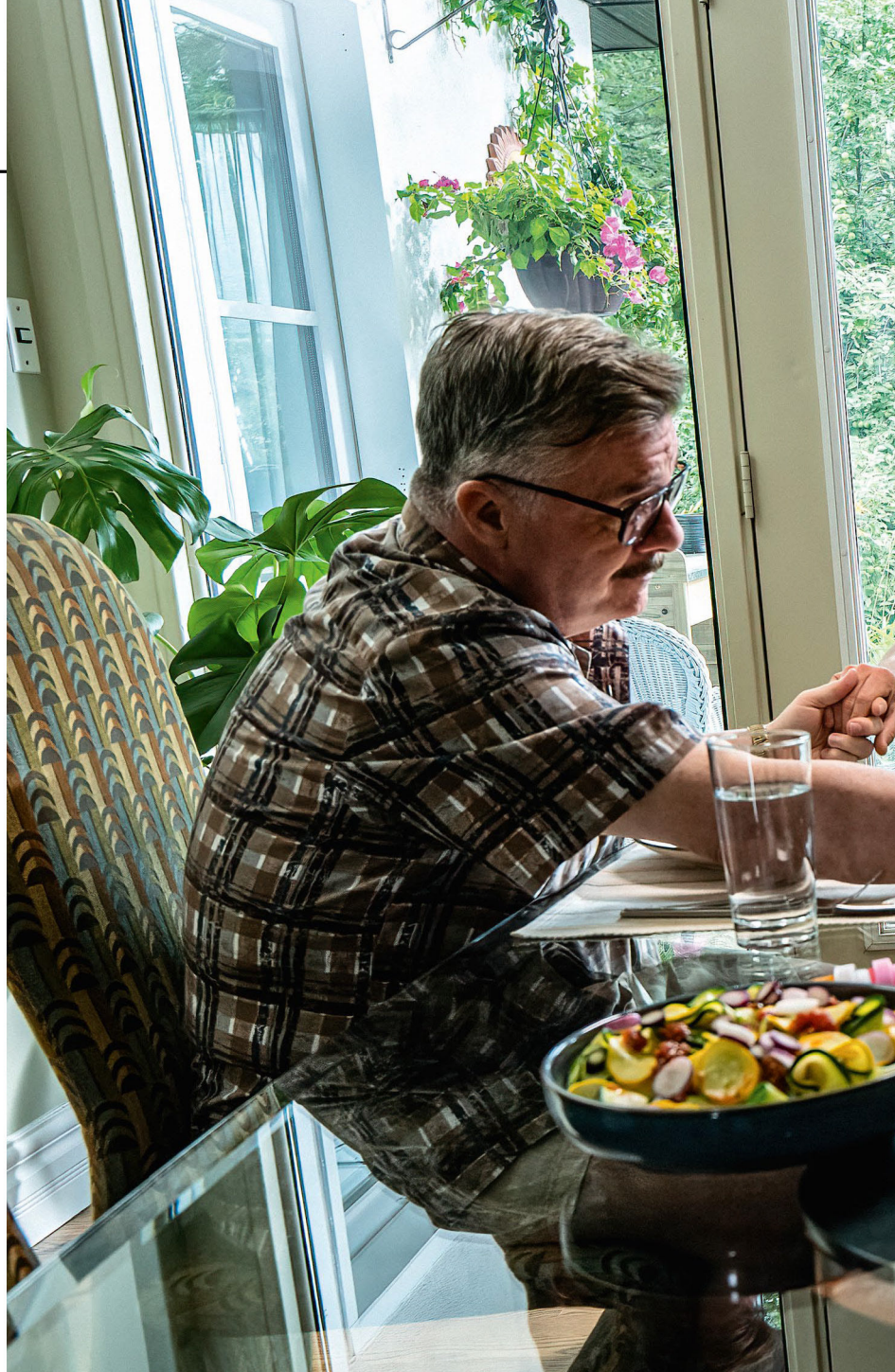
For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

From his darkest fears comes the greatest adventure' – so goes the tagline for *Beau Is Afraid*, Ari Aster's 179-minute follow-up to his landmark 21st-century horrors *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*. With all due respect to the marketing department at A24, rarely has a pithy tagline – and the whimsical, *Benjamin Button*-esque poster it adorns – done a greater disservice to the substance of a film it purports to represent.

That's because *Beau Is Afraid* is an extraordinary rendering of severe clinical anxiety, using the language of horror cinema to visualise the paranoid nightmare that something as simple as stepping foot outside can turn into. At points, it's a stress-watch to rival Safdie bros nerve-shredder *Uncut Gems*. But it's also a deeply funny Freudian head-fuck, laden with Jewish guilt and unresolved mummy issues. Try selling that on a poster.

Continuing his mission to become the leading man of choice for every auteur filmmaker in Hollywood, Joaquin Phoenix stars as Beau, a troubled 40-something about to visit his successful, domineering mother (Patti LuPone). Residing in a dilapidated apartment on the most dangerous street corner in America, Beau is living in a hell of his own delusion. Dead bodies go ignored in the road, a venomous spider is loose in his building, and a serial killer called Birthday Boy Stab Man roams the streets completely starkers. It's pure chaos – the world hostile to Beau to comical extremes.

Is any of this supposed to be taken at face value? That seems unlikely. Aster is operating in the realm of psychosis and metaphor here. Pre-release materials



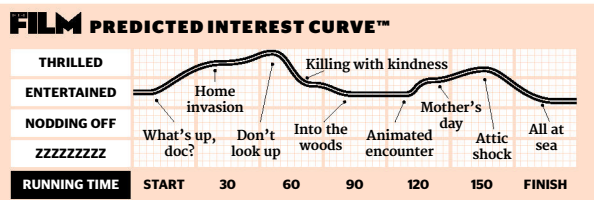
have downplayed the film's horror leanings, but fear remains a key feature – it's just that Aster's twisted sense of humour registers higher in the mix than ever before. Broken into four distinct, episodic sequences (followed by a conclusive epilogue), the opening 45-minute chapter set in and around Beau's apartment is instantly arresting and extremely effective, expanding on Aster's own 2011 short, *Beau*, and culminating with one of the most hysterically tense and funny freakouts in recent memory.

There's still miles and miles to go after this, but the film never quite reaches the same heights again. En route to his mother, Beau is run over by Nathan Lane and Amy Ryan's suspiciously cheery couple, and taken to their home to recuperate. Things take a turn for the Lynchian here as

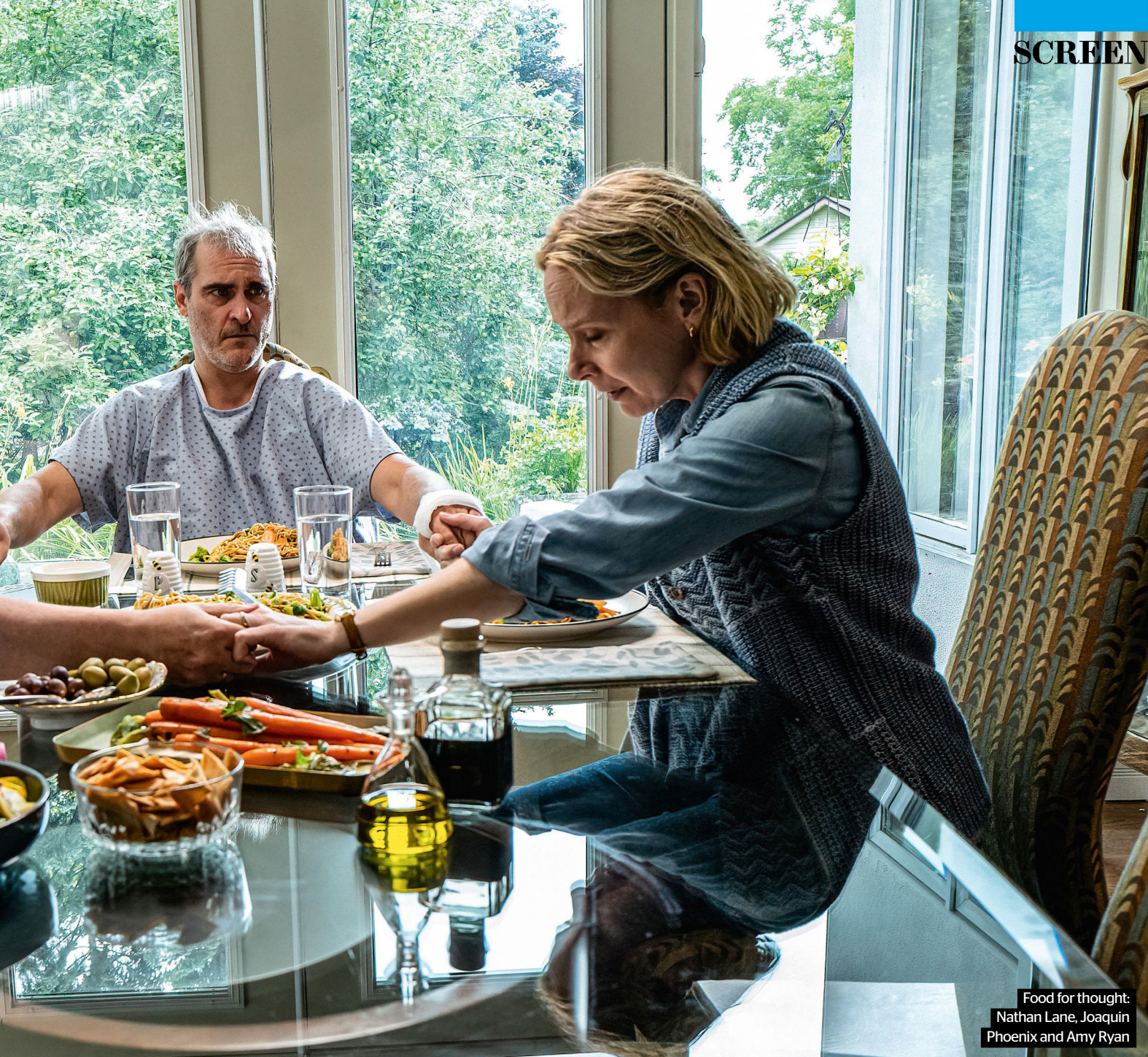
**DIRECTOR** Ari Aster **STARRING** Joaquin Phoenix, Nathan Lane, Amy Ryan, Parker Posey, Patti LuPone, Stephen McKinley Henderson **SCREENPLAY** Ari Aster **DISTRIBUTOR** Sony **RUNNING TIME** 179 mins

Beau, in a perpetual state of panic, finds himself trapped in white-picket-fence America, with a family so unhinged that he appears the picture of sound mental health in comparison.

In another chapter, Beau stumbles across a travelling theatre company in the woods, who put on a production designed to 'blur the line between the audience and the players'. What follows is the film's most significant stylistic flex as Beau imagines himself the subject of the story being told onstage, traversing striking arts-and-craft







Food for thought:  
Nathan Lane, Joaquin  
Phoenix and Amy Ryan

landscapes for a dark story-book fable. It looks great, but you might be left wondering what it all means.

The specifics of the confrontational final chapter deserve to be discovered in context, but it's no spoiler to say that the film is reinvigorated by the arrival of Parker Posey as an old flame of Beau's. She appears to be in the film purely to facilitate the funniest sex scene – set, incredibly, to Mariah Carey's *Always Be My Baby* – since *Team America: World Police*. And while the film is undoubtedly too strange to be embraced by awards bodies, LuPone makes such an outsized impression during her brief time on screen that you could imagine her cleaning up if this were a more accessible release.

At a minute shy of three hours, it's an awful lot of movie, and we haven't even mentioned Denis

### 'Aster is in full control of an esoteric odyssey into a broken mind, flipping proceedings from hysterically funny to horrifying in a heartbeat'

Ménochet's crazed army vet who turns Terminator for a stretch. Phoenix is typically committed in a way that hardly warrants mention, packing on the paunch and reportedly passing out during filming, but there's only one (m)Aster of ceremonies here. And while the director pulls out a few familiar party tricks – night-to-day match cuts, figures lurking in the rafters, people plunging to their death on rocks – he's in full tonal control of a staunchly esoteric odyssey into a broken mind, flipping proceedings from hysterically funny to horrifying in a heartbeat.

Like many an auteur filmmaker's passion project, it's a huge swing that

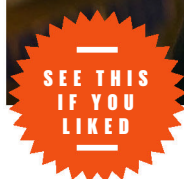
doesn't always fully connect, and one that undoubtedly peaks too soon. But at a time when safe-bet sequels, franchise extensions and movies built on brand recognition are more prevalent than ever, the fact that something so singular exists and succeeds on its own terms is something to be celebrated. Be afraid? Yes. But more importantly, get excited. **JORDAN FARLEY**

**THE VERDICT** Ari Aster follows up *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* with a film so strange it makes Charlie Kaufman's cinematic oeuvre look conventional. Peek inside Beau's fractured mind, if you dare...





It's hard to say who has the worse dress sense, really



# RENFIELD <sup>15</sup>

An unfamiliar take on Drac's servant...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

**DIRECTOR** Chris McKay **STARRING** Nicholas Hoult, Nicolas Cage, Awkwafina, Ben Schwartz, Shohreh Aghdashloo **SCREENPLAY** Ryan Ridley **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 93 mins

**DRACULA** 1931  
This Bram Stoker adap set the template for Universal's beloved creature features.

**VAMPIRE'S KISS** 1988  
Playing a literary agent who turns into a vampire, Cage famously ate a cockroach for real.

**VAN HELSING** 2004  
*Renfield* shares DNA with Stephen Sommers' hyperactive action movie, but is far superior.

For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](http://gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

With the notable exception of Leigh Whannell's deeply disturbing *The Invisible Man*, recent attempts to reboot Universal's squad of classic monsters have crashed and burned like the windmill at the end of James Whale's *Frankenstein*. But with Tom Cruise's high-pitched shriek still ringing in our ears from the nosediving plane in *The Mummy* (the metaphor writes itself), *Renfield*, spun around Dracula's bug-eating familiar, proves there's plenty more mashing yet to be done by these monsters.

Chris McKay's film positions itself as a direct sequel to Universal's 1931 *Dracula* starring Bela Lugosi (some *Zelig/Forrest Gump*-like technical wizardry replaces Dwight Frye's Renfield with

Nicholas Hoult's in flashbacks). The hook here is that Renfield is attending support-group sessions to unpick his co-dependent relationship with his narcissistic boss. 'I will no longer tolerate abuse, I deserve love,' he tells Dracula, played by Nicolas Cage as a cross between Lugosi's Count and *Wild at Heart*'s flamboyant Sailor. 'You deserve only suffering,' Dracula replies.

The neatly knitted plot takes in traffic cops Rebecca (Awkwafina) and Chris (Adrian Martinez), Shohreh Aghdashloo's (*The Expanse*) mob boss Ella and a gang of drug dealers led by Ben Schwartz's Tedward, with everybody comically mistaking everybody else: Ella thinks Renfield is a rival in 'the five families', and Dracula assumes Teddy is a vampire hunter assigned by the church. The crossfire is bloody. And Renfield, who wants only to settle into his new pastel-painted apartment, slip-slides in the middle of it all.

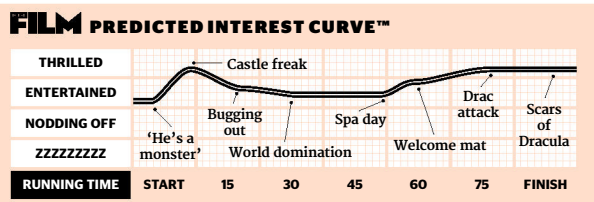
While it hardly stays with you like *The Invisible Man*, Renfield is a fun

Friday night at the movies. Director McKay (*The Tomorrow War*, *The Lego Batman Movie*) keeps things flowing by making good use of Hoult's droll delivery and the New Orleans locations, while the pixels never stop pumping when it comes to the CG blood. Drac attacks like *The Flash* with fangs, and he's not the only one granted superhero capabilities: one slug of bug juice and Renfield has all the moves of John Wick. He can also punch people through walls; a burly brawl between a bunch of familiars belongs in *The Matrix Reloaded*. Or maybe not – someone's arms are cut off with a decorative serving platter.

*Renfield* dishes several such pleasures. So when Dracula at one point cries 'Let's eat!', you'd do well to get to the cinema and obey his command.

**JAMIE GRAHAM**

**THE VERDICT** Not a classic monster movie, but there are plenty of eye-bugging moments in this neon-drenched, blood-soaked comedy horror.





## ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET. PG

Young and mild...

★★★★★ OUT 19 MAY CINEMAS

In an era when many schoolkids are more concerned about gun violence (in the US), cyberbullying and sending nudes than the seemingly more old-fashioned growing pains of who you are and whether the popular boy fancies you, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.* is a welcome, nostalgic throwback to simpler times.

In adapting Judy Blume's 1970 novel, writer/director Kelly Fremon Craig depicts a more innocent age, where girls look at penises in anatomy books and giggle, then scan the pages of *Playboy* for comparisons to their own developing bodies. When Margaret (Abby Ryder Fortson) and her family uproot from city to suburbs, the physical shift isn't the only challenge. The move sparks internal flux, not just within Margaret but among the generations of women in the family.

As Margaret asks God for the things she wants – bras, periods and kissing boys in cupboards are rites of passage – she also interrogates religion, in the light of her parents' (Rachel McAdams and Benny Safdie) interfaith marriage. Fortson makes an endearing Margaret and McAdams is at her most sincere and likeable. Meanwhile, Kathy Bates invests Margaret's paternal grandma with commanding and nuanced notes, vital qualities both in a quietly feminist antidote to some of the noisier films out there. **KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER**

**THE VERDICT** A gentle, absorbing tale of adolescence filled with pathos, humour and subtle, charming performances.



## STILL: A MICHAEL J. FOX MOVIE TBC

In health and in sickness...

★★★★★ OUT 12 MAY CINEMAS, APPLE TV+

He gets knocked down, but he gets up again; you're never going to keep him down. That's the main takeaway from this intimate survey of Michael J. Fox's life and times, one that movingly juxtaposes the giddy highs of his 80s heyday ('I was bigger than bubblegum') with the daily struggles he now faces from the Parkinson's disease he was diagnosed with in 1991.

The title of Davis Guggenheim's documentary works two ways, reminding us its subject is still the boyish scamp from *Back to the Future* while also alluding to one of his defining attributes: a nervous, skittery energy that, while integral to Alex P. Keaton in *Family Ties* and *Spin City*'s Mike Flaherty, must now be restrained lest it cause him serious physical injury. 'You knocked me off my feet!' he tells a fan amiably after a brief New York encounter sees him tumble on the sidewalk.

A little stillness would not go amiss, at least as far as doting spouse Tracy is concerned. Yet it's heartening to find Fox so fearlessly unhumiliated by his condition and the mobility problems that come with it. One of the star's stipulations before consenting to this film was that it would have 'no violins'. By its end you'll be happy to give him the whole flipping orchestra. **NEIL SMITH**

**THE VERDICT** A well-crafted look at Michael J. Fox that balances affectionate nostalgia with unflinching candour.



# POLITE SOCIETY TBC

The fun and the Fury...

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

SEE THIS  
IF YOU  
LIKED

## BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM

2002  
Gurinder  
Chadha's feel-  
good comedy  
pits footballing  
freedom against  
nice-girl  
decorum.

## SCOTT PILGRIM VS. THE WORLD

2010  
Michael Cera's  
dorky bassist  
battles his dream  
girl's seven lethal  
exes in Edgar  
Wright's quirky  
comedy.

## MS. MARVEL

2022  
Obsessive  
suburban fangirl  
Kamala finds  
family secrets  
buried in her  
explosive new  
superpowers.

For more reviews  
visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](http://gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

**H**issing 'I am the Fury', suburban schoolgirl Ria Khan (Priya Kansara) throws herself into a stream of kung fu leaps, punches and roundhouse kicks for her YouTube channel. A wannabe stuntwoman, she's the surprise heroine of this rowdy and wildly charming action comedy, whose writer-director Nida Manzoor – in her debut feature – switches up the genre by representing South Asian girls as fighters rather than fragile flowers.

Bringing the same brash, punky, teen vibe as her BAFTA-winning TV comedy *We Are Lady Parts*, Manzoor rustles up a playful, high-energy caper, centred on a ferocious sibling bond. Ria's idolised elder sister Lena (*The Umbrella Academy*'s Ritu Arya), a failing art student, has fallen suspiciously rapidly for wealthy bachelor doctor Salim Shah (Akshay Khanna), and Ria is determined to torpedo their upcoming marriage.

Sisterhood's pains and loyalties root the movie (hell, it worked for *Frozen*), providing novel emotional stakes that contrast nicely with the traditional emphasis on romance or bromance in action movies. Desperate for both sisters to have dream careers rather than prestige marriages, Ria is horrified by her pleasant parents' hunger for Lena to settle down. Though not a *Bend It Like Beckham*-ish culture-clash comedy, the film isn't shy of flagging some sharply funny opinions about the social pressures on South Asian women to marry. The business-like Mr Khan (Jeff Mirza) assures his horrified daughter that Salim is a catch, and that the only answer to the overly competitive 'free market for marriages' is the parental outsourcing that produced Lena's arranged union.



Raheela (Nimra Bucha) and Ria (Priya Kansara) face off in Nida Manzoor's high-energy debut

Sparring, bickering and cheering each other on, the driven Kansara and charmingly cool Arya make Ria and Lena's sibling relationship feel rich, real and then increasingly fractious, when Ria launches 'Operation Wifehunter' to dig up dirt and smear hated 'smarmy wanker' Salim. Pouring out her suspicions in unanswered emails to (real-life) stunt star Eunice Huthart, Ria has never been so alone.

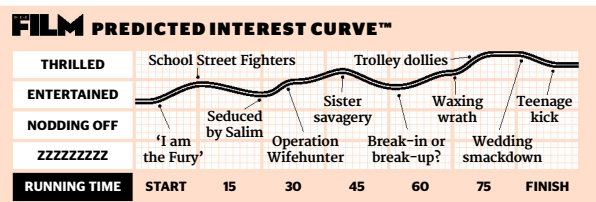
As Ria's relationship-wrecking attempts turn wilder, Manzoor's story is propelled by its cheerfully inventive approach to genre, which confidently mashes up Jackie Chan-style combat and high-school comedy with Bollywood spectacle. So after Ria's naked hostility and snooping causes friction at the Shahs' lavish 'Eid soirée' and at family dinners, the comedy of manners about Muslim marital expectations vs 'following your dream' gives way to an

**DIRECTOR** Nida Manzoor **STARRING** Priya Kansara, Ritu Arya, Nimra Bucha, Seraphina Beh, Akshay Khanna **SCREENPLAY** Nida Manzoor **DISTRIBUTOR** Universal **RUNNING TIME** 103 mins

energetic action quest of scrappy fights and tense, thieving capers. Manzoor plaits it all together with vintage-sounding Bollywood dance tunes, tight transitions and goofy visual gags.

In the fashion of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, cringe-comedy interludes slam into punchy bouts that loosen reality, as in the scene where Ria takes on school bully Kovacs (the fights have jaunty, retro, *Street Fighter*-font title captions) in a hail of vicious Ken Masters kicks and shattered bookcases.

Only a swerve late on into 'social thriller' mode feels a little less nimble, as Ria's deft but bungled break-in at







Shah's mansion uncovers potentially horrific secrets. Manzoor is smart enough to use this scary twist as a useful story destabiliser (has Ria lost her grip, or descended into paranoia?). But the film's nod at a *Get Out*-style terror streak feels over-ambitious, a rare false step.

Otherwise, *Polite Society* stays zippy and exuberant, aided by Manzoor putting the comic storylines at the movie's heart. They're largely the property of school pals Alba and Clara (the pleasingly sarcastic Ella Bruccoleri and Seraphina Beh); recruited to help execute Ria's wild schemes, the duo inject shrieking enthusiasm and panicky resourcefulness into risky blags and heists. The film is at its most bouncily PG-13 here, high on friendship and fumbled plans. Watching them steal Salim's laptop from his locker by swaggering nervously into the men's changing room in fake moustaches is a sweaty triumph.

### **'What holds everything together and stops the film from sliding into a winking spoof is the intensity of Priya Kansara's performance'**

Extra points are gained, too, for the way Manzoor's coming-of-age film translates the visceral feelings teens have when arguing into big, OTT, martial-arts throwdowns. The crunchy but not cartoonish fight scenes send Ria whirling and bloody-nosed through school brawls, brutal sisterly fisticuffs and a whiplash tag-team tussle with deadly beauticians delivering a wicked waxing. By the time of the Bollywood-style action climax and Ria's no-guts-no-glory stand-off with the film's villain, every wirework-filled confrontation has served a different flavour.

What holds everything together and stops the film from sliding into a winking spoof is the intensity of

newcomer Kansara's performance. Her obsessive Ria drives the movie's frantic pace with sheer willpower and scrappy physical courage. Sure, she's bratty and over-dramatic, and seems positively unhinged to Salim's equally formidable mother Raheela (*Ms. Marvel*'s Nimra Bucha, dialling the intimidation up to 11). But you're always conscious that it's Ria's overwhelming love for Lena that drives this sister to do it for herself.

**KATE STABLES**

**THE VERDICT** A charm-bomb of a movie, whose marriage-mashing antics, teen capers and crunchy combat sequences deliver a roundhouse kick to the genre.



Everyone desperately  
hoped no one  
would start singing



SEE THIS  
IF YOU  
LIKED

## HOW TO BLOW UP A PIPELINE <sup>15</sup>

Words into action...

**SORCERER** 1977  
William Friedkin's explosive take on *The Wages of Fear* seems referenced in *Pipeline*'s score.

**GOOD TIME** 2017  
The Safdie brothers' film operates on a similar level of dread.

**CAM** 2018  
An erotic web performer is haunted by her supernatural digital double in Goldhaber's first feature.

For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](http://gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

**M**ainstream filmmakers face a tricky balancing act when it comes to tackling the climate crisis and portraying those who are fighting to avert eco-catastrophe. An approach that is either too light or too po-faced risks undermining the efforts of real-life activists. Even Kelly Reichardt's generally solid thriller *Night Moves* (2013) went down a hackneyed route, in which paranoia tore its characters apart.

In contrast, the electric, forthright *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* excels as both truly riveting entertainment and an energising call to action, in part through the cleverness of its genre conceit: what could be a better fit for a story about collective action and fighting the system than a heist movie?

For his fictional narrative, director Daniel Goldhaber draws inspiration

**DIRECTOR** Daniel Goldhaber **STARRING** Ariela Barer, Kristine Froseth, Lukas Gage, Forrest Goodluck, Sasha Lane **SCREENPLAY** Ariela Barer, Daniel Goldhaber, Jordan Sjol **DISTRIBUTOR** Vertigo Releasing **RUNNING TIME** 104 mins

from Andreas Malm's non-fiction book of the same name. Published in 2021, Malm's eco-manifesto explores how virtually no historically successful instance of mass popular change, such as democratic uprisings against dictatorships, has occurred without property destruction becoming part of the tactical efforts. Taking that thesis as its cue, Goldhaber's sharp movie follows a crew of eight young people, from various walks of life and American states, as they target two vulnerable parts of a major Texas oil pipeline with explosives. Their aim? To trap the contents and devastate the nation's fossil-fuel industry.

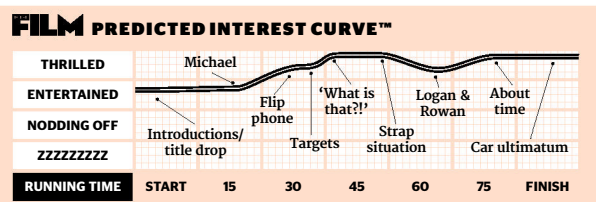
No heist movie can thrive without appealing characters at the centre, and this film has them in abundance. The uniformly excellent and charismatic

cast includes Ariela Barer (also one of the co-writers), Forrest Goodluck, Sasha Lane and Lukas Gage, whose characters' sympathetic backstories are doled out in concise flashbacks. These are expertly positioned in the story, at moments when your heart is already in your mouth. Positing their plan as an act of self-defence, each of the activists has been radicalised by personal traumatic experiences into risking it all.

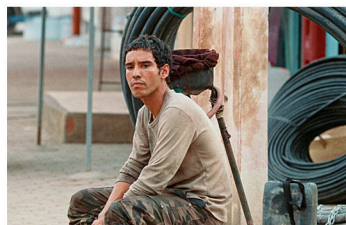
The potentially convoluted time jumps never sabotage the momentum of Goldhaber and editor Daniel Garber's nerve-shredding storytelling, which brings to mind explosive classic thrillers such as Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* (1953) and the wild urgency of the Safdie brothers' work. And somehow, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* is also a legitimately fun desert hangout movie, where it just so happens that the characters might accidentally blow themselves up at any moment.

**JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

**THE VERDICT** A perfectly paced and impeccably crafted nail-biter, this offers as much food for thought as heart-racing tension.





**HARKA** TBC

★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

The mounting desperation of a put-upon young street vendor who ekes out a living selling contraband petrol lends a ticking-clock intensity to Lotfy Nathan's compelling portrait of hardscrabble life in post-revolutionary Tunisia. Tormented by debt, familial obligations and festering feelings of injustice, Ali (Adam Bessa) is a powder-keg waiting to explode – a walking testament, in other words, to the thwarted aspirations of the Arab Spring. Fleeting moments of quiet contemplation and his sister's mournful voiceover inject poignancy into what otherwise resembles a perpetual howl of impotent rage. **NEIL SMITH**

**THE UNLIKELY PILGRIMAGE OF HAROLD FRY** 12A

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

Jim Broadbent stars as the titular retiree who goes full Proclaimers and decides to walk 500-ish miles, all the way from South Devon to Berwick-upon-Tweed. His former colleague Queenie is dying of cancer, and Harold believes his pilgrimage will keep her alive. Director Hettie Macdonald (*Normal People*) doesn't shy away from infusing this story with a spiritual message about human kindness, even if the result is quite twee. Broadbent gives his all, though, and Penelope Wilton does wonders with a thankless role as his left-behind, befuddled wife.

**JAMES MOTTRAM****THE EIGHT MOUNTAINS** TBC

★★★★★ OUT 12 MAY CINEMAS

Adapted from Paolo Cognetti's bestselling novel by Belgian duo Felix van Groeningen (*Beautiful Boy*) and Charlotte Vandermeersch, this intimate epic explores the profound friendship shared by two Italian men, Bruno (Alessandro Borghi) and Pietro (Luca Marinelli), over several decades. They first meet as 11-year-olds one summer holiday in the Aosta Valley – and it's this majestic Alpine region that will shape their lives. Impactfully lensed on location, this elegiac drama draws much of its emotional resonance from what remains unspoken between the two leads. **TOM DAWSON**

**PLAN 75** 15

★★★★★ OUT 12 MAY CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

An emotive core concept spurs sober contemplations on ageing, national identity and neglect in director Chie Hayakawa's minor-key drama. Facing a 'surplus of seniors', the government in a near-future Japan invites over-75s to accept euthanasia, with cash incentives. Hayakawa downplays any protests to focus on two potential candidates, showing how much they would have to live for – if society cared. While the message is obvious, Hayakawa's careful balance of little intimacies and big decisions frames a poised meditation on mortality, lifted by Chieko Baisho's emphatically alive lead. **KEVIN HARLEY**



Teyana Taylor excels in her first lead role

**A THOUSAND AND ONE** 15

Mother superior...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

When it comes to singers-turned-actors, for every Oscar-worthy performance (Cher in the sublime comedy *Moonstruck*, say) there is a charisma vacuum (Vanilla Ice in *Cool as Ice*, anyone?). For her first lead role, R&B star Teyana Taylor's turn leans towards the former, warranting its own golden statuette.

Taylor takes on a demanding part as the free-spirited Inez de la Paz, a hairdresser in 90s New York who is determined to protect her son Terry from the foster care system. Released after a period of incarceration, Inez kidnaps the boy and relocates to Harlem, where she sets about raising him.

Battling to protect her child over the film's decade-long span, Inez finds herself beset by the effects of social decay. In this area of New York, gentrification makes her environment increasingly hostile. A.V. Rockwell's direction is competent, if a little unimaginative, but the Harlem setting combines with Taylor's committed performance to elevate it to something vibrant and meaningful. As the odds stack up against Inez, Taylor makes her determination to move beyond her self-proclaimed 'fucked-up beginnings' heartbreaking.

It's not hard to see why *A Thousand and One* won the hearts of Sundance voters, securing the 2023 festival's grand jury prize. With an actor such as Taylor as the lead, it's unlikely to be the only accolade it accumulates. **LEILA LATIF**

**THE VERDICT** Singer Teyana Taylor proves a multi-faceted talent in this harrowing tribute to the dispossessed.





## IP MAN: THE AWAKENING 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW ICON FILM  
CHANNEL 5 MAY CINEMAS

Miu Tse takes on the role of Bruce Lee's mentor in a prequel story that doesn't quite live up to previous saga entries. The action is set just after Ip Man arrives in Hong Kong, where he encounters crime and corruption, clashing with a human-trafficking gang led by boxing brute Mr. Stark (Sergio De Ieso). Tse is a charming lead, and he clearly has the fighting skills, but the choreography and editing fail to deliver anything close to the knockout action scenes of the earlier, Donnie Yen-starring instalments.

MATT LOOKER



## GOD'S PETTING YOU 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Told in flashbacks as heroin addict Charlie (George Webster) relates a crazed story to his deadpan therapist (Alice Lowe), this Brighton-set crime comedy from British writer-director Jamie Patterson (*The Kindred*) sees Charlie meet a sex addict (Skye Lourie) at a support group. Soon, they concoct a plan to rob her 'abusive porn-star boyfriend' (Benedict Garrett) and 'sail off into the sunset' together. The result is a quirky noir with amusing dialogue and a dash of naturalism – the urban settings are granted a somnolent beauty by the night-time lensing – but a final sharp left turn in the plot doesn't quite work. **JAMIE GRAHAM**



Adoptee Freddie (Park Ji-min) sets off to find her birth parents

## RETURN TO SEOUL 15

Station to station...

★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

**B**etween bouts of partying and freeform dancing, newcomer Park Ji-min brings a near-musical virtuosity to this questing character piece. Writer/director Davy Chou knows his lead's worth: trusting deeply in Park, he anchors a captivating portrait of choppy selfhood in her febrile nuances of expression.

Born in South Korea, Park's Freddie was raised in France by foster parents. At 25, she revisits Seoul – by accident, she claims – and locates her birth parents, spurring a free-roaming journey of self-discovery that swerves between homefront clashes and hedonistic excesses.

Channelling Wong Kar-wai's influence, Chou directs as if by intuition, taking radical turns and time jumps as Freddie's episodic story develops. Not all of his twists convince – Freddie's period selling arms, say – but his alert, watchful direction makes the film feel alive in each moment, centred on the now but ever poised to dart off on fresh trajectories.

Among a fine cast that also includes *Oldboy*'s Oh Kwang-Rok as her birth father, Park provides an immaculately instinctive focus for Chou's picaresque plotting. Between big nights out and shock career moves, she nails the impression of a woman suspended between stations, determined to map her own life routes. The score by Jérémie Arcache and Christophe Musset matches her impulsive quest beautifully: ushering Freddie from cafes to clubs, its unforced fluency beguiles.

KEVIN HARLEY

**THE VERDICT** Minor plot stumbles aside, Park Ji-min's electric lead energises a nimble investigation into identity.



## LEAVING TO REMAIN 12A

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

This documentary follows three people from Central Europe's Roma community. Touching on the discrimination that forced them to leave for the UK in search of a better life, it tracks the hoops they must jump through to remain in Britain following Brexit. Denisa works tirelessly as a lawyer; Petr is an ex-police officer turned MBE-decorated community figurehead; and Ondrej works 12-hour shifts at a day job while studying psychology. The film sidesteps historical persecution but emphasises the importance of education, and effectively humanises asylum seekers.

KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER



## LIVING WITH CHUCKY 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW BD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Featurettes

Kyra Elise Gardner's heartfelt doc offers a unique perspective on everyone's favourite killer doll. The filmmaker's dad Tony (make-up man on *Seed of Chucky*) has been working with Chucky for more than 20 years, making the slasher icon an ersatz sibling to the director. Gardner follows a found family of filmmakers and fans who span generations; the result is an occasionally saccharine love letter not just to Chucky but to horror cinema and practical FX. Notable omission: the 2019 reboot, though you can see why no one brought that up... **JOEL HARLEY**





**ONE TRUE LOVES** PG  
★★★★★ OUT 3 MAY PRIME VIDEO

Emma (Phillipa Soo) is engaged to Sam (Simu Liu), only to learn that her 'dead' husband, Jesse (Luke Bracey), has actually been stranded on a desert island for years. So who's Mr. Right? There's a whiff of 'Movie of the Week' to this romantic drama from *Playing with Fire* director Andy Fickman, adapted from the novel by Taylor Jenkins Reid (*Daisy Jones & the Six*). But it makes interesting points about how we change as we move through life, and the likeable leads (you'll know them from, respectively, *Hamilton*, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* and the 2015 *Point Break* remake) ensure it's, well, likeable.

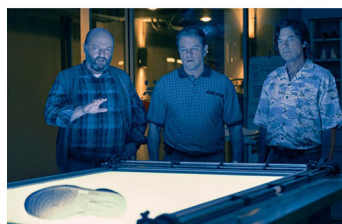
JAMIE GRAHAM



**BERG** 12A  
★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

One for those who find the work of slow-cinema doyen Béla Tarr too eventful, Joke Olthaar's doc comprises 79 minutes of largely static black-and-white shots of mountains bookended by brief voiceovers from three climbers. Yet adjust to its ruminative rhythm and the result is quietly hypnotic. Olthaar and cinematographer André Schreuders deliver a string of entrancing images (raindrops dripping from clifftops after a thunderstorm, clouds swirling around a peak resembling waves crashing against rocks) until a jarring, if short-lived, shift around the hour mark breaks the spell.

CHRIS SCHILLING



**AIR** 15  
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Ben Affleck directs an entertaining look at a pivotal moment in sporting and shoe history, buoyed by an MVP cast. Matt Damon is dogged hoop nerd Sonny Vaccaro, out to convince his boss (Affleck) and colleagues (Jason Bateman, Chris Tucker) of the Air Jordan's potential if Nike signs Michael Jordan in 1984. Given Affleck's fascination with the idea of celebrity worth, it's odd that Jordan is a shadowy figure within his own story, never truly seen or heard. But move past that aspect and *Air* is a zingy underdog tale, loaded with basketball nous and crowd-pleasing 1980s needle drops, fashions, tech and wigs.

JANE CROWTHER



**THE LAUREATE** 15  
★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

This arid period piece about World War One poet Robert Graves (Tom Hughes) focuses on his creative dry spell, moistened by his connection with American poet Laura Riding (Dianna Agron). Returned from war, Graves is dogged by PTSD. Emotional distance from his wife Nancy Nicholson (Laura Haddock) propels him into Laura's arms – with the blessings of Nancy, who also benefits from Laura's libertine enthusiasms. Performances buoy a pedestrian biopic that never gets under the characters' skins, while themes including misogyny, polyamory and privilege resonate.

KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER



**RODEO** 15

On your bike...

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

"I was born with a bike between my legs!" says wild child motorcycle thief Julia (Julie Ledru) as she deprives another unsuspecting dupe of his prized two-wheeler. Larceny, though, is only one element in Lola Quivoron's propulsive French drama, in which a young outcast's need for speed sees her throwing in her lot with a clandestine band of chop-shopping, wheelie-popping adrenaline junkies.

Infused with a grubby authenticity that its director dubs 'supernaturalism', the earthy result – filmed near-chronologically with a largely non-professional cast – resembles an early entry in the *Fast & Furious* franchise motocrossed with the Dardenne brothers. Yet there's also an eerie fatalism at work, ghostly visitations from a recently deceased gang member and a fiery finale redolent of *Ghost Rider* turning Julia's gas-guzzling rite-of-passage into something altogether more elusive and ethereal.

At its heart lies a startling debut from Ledru, a real-life biker recruited via Instagram who makes her unconventional heroine every bit as untamed as her tousled leonine tresses. Antonia Buresi, meanwhile, provides glam support as her boss' wife Ophélie, a mother kept a virtual prisoner by her absent jailbird husband. Some will find the ending baffling, if not downright infuriating. What's undeniable, however, is the escapist thrill one vicariously receives from watching Julia live her life uncompromisingly, a quarter mile at a time. **NEIL SMITH**

**THE VERDICT** A social-realist heist movie with a strong female lead, *Rodeo* is worth revving up for.



Ana de Armas tries  
to ignore Chris Evans'  
romance-by-firelight shtick



SEE THIS  
IF YOU  
LIKED

#### ROMANCING THE STONE

1984

Romance author Kathleen Turner has a jungle adventure with Michael Douglas' mercenary rogue.

#### MR. & MRS. SMITH

2005  
Brangelina add fireworks to their marriage as assassins assigned to kill one another.

#### THE LOST CITY

2022  
Romance novelist Sandra Bullock and cover model Channing Tatum get some action.

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## GHOSTED<sup>12</sup>

Cap and Marilyn spy a romance...

★★★★★ OUT NOW APPLE TV+

It's not hard to see why the pitch from *Deadpool* scribes Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick got Apple TV+ interested: a romantic action-comedy in the vein of *Romancing the Stone*, only with a role reversal so the guy's squealing and the gal's kicking ass. It's a doozy even before you make that flailing, floundering guy Chris Evans, aka Captain America, and the gal shielding him from danger Ana de Armas, whose killer moves so impressed Daniel Craig's Bond in *No Time to Die*.

Thing is, *Ghosted* doesn't start off as an action movie at all, instead catfishing us into thinking it's a meet-cute romance, as farmer Cole (Evans) flirts with art curator Sadie (de Armas) at a market stall and then walks and talks

**DIRECTOR** Dexter Fletcher **STARRING** Ana de Armas, Chris Evans, Adrien Brody, Tim Blake Nelson, Amy Sedaris **SCREENPLAY** Chris McKenna, Rhett Reese, Erik Sommers, Paul Wernick **DISTRIBUTOR** Apple **RUNNING TIME** 116 mins

through a giddy night in Georgetown, Washington. Their connection is intense, so why is she now not answering his text messages? Cole refuses to believe she's ghosting him and makes the 'grand romantic gesture' of flying to London to surprise Sadie on her work trip. Only it turns out she's a secret agent and he's plonked himself slap-bang in the middle of her dangerous mission.

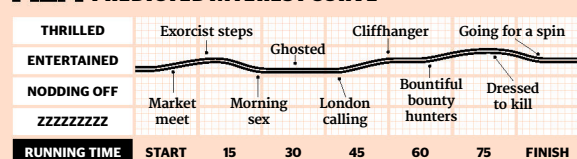
Directed by Dexter Fletcher, *Ghosted* represents another step up in scale for the filmmaker who's gone from drama *Wild Bill* to musical *Sunshine on Leith* to adventure-comedy *Eddie the Eagle* to Elton John biopic *Rocketman*. Is choreographing action really so different to orchestrating musical numbers? Well, the various fisticuffs,

gun battles and vehicular chases kind of hit the required notes, though it's hard not to think of Cole and Sadie visiting a karaoke bar during their date – the non-stop carnage across numerous exotic locales feels like a cover version, fun but forgettable. An overabundance of CGI certainly doesn't help, removing all soul. And peril.

Ultimately, it's the stars who pull us through. Sharing the screen more extensively than they did in *Knives Out* and *The Gray Man*, de Armas and Evans fire prattle-of-the-sexes quips as they dodge bullets. They do better than the rather awkward running gags of characters telling them to get a room, and numerous famous faces popping up as bounty hunters. Still, kudos for bringing some fresh IP to our franchise-clogged screens, even if the coda makes it clear that everyone's ready to answer the call for *Ghosted 2*. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**THE VERDICT** The fast and furious action is a bit plasticky, but the two starry leads bring some real sparks.

#### FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



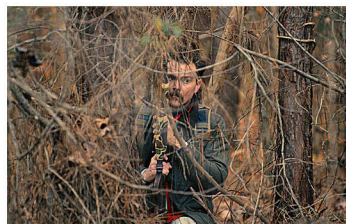




## NAM JUNE PAIK: MOON IS THE OLDEST TV 12

★★★★★ OUT 19 MAY CINEMAS

Narrated and executive produced by Steven Yeun, Amanda Kim's debut doc is an insightful trip into the world of the late Nam June Paik. Among other things, the Korean-American artist spoke about 20 languages (badly) and coined the term 'electronic superhighway' long before Al Gore ever got there. A disciple of avant-garde composer John Cage, Paik's 70s video-art experiments also proved hugely influential on Talking Heads, Prince and many others, as Kim's crafty mix of archive deep-dive and interviews reveals in this lively, if fairly linear, tribute. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

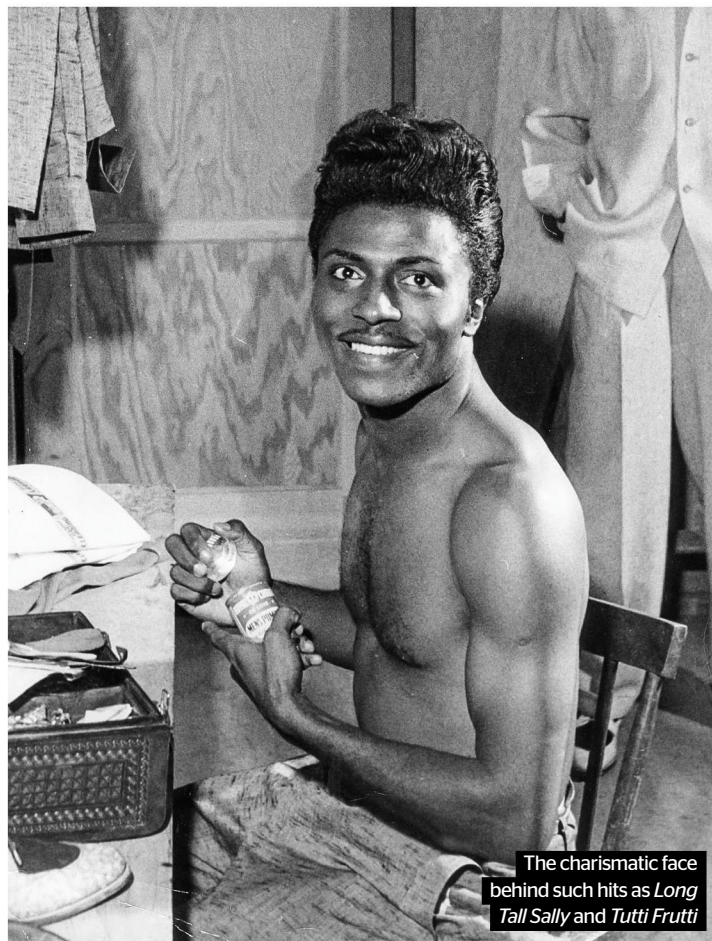


## THE INTEGRITY OF JOSEPH CHAMBERS 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW BD, DIGITAL

An insecure family man's mission to prove his masculinity goes awry when wannabe survivalist Joe (Clayne Crawford) marches into the woods with nothing else but a rifle, a bee in his bonnet and a handsome moustache. Writer/director Robert Machoian's contemporary western stretches the patience on occasion, but rewards the time spent with a vein of bleakly farcical humour and some finely tuned performances. Jordana Brewster and Jeffrey Dean Morgan impress in minor roles, but this is Crawford's party – a one-guy showcase of crumbling manhood, alone in the woods.

**JOEL HARLEY**



The charismatic face behind such hits as *Long Tall Sally* and *Tutti Frutti*

## LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING 15

*Appetite for transgression...*

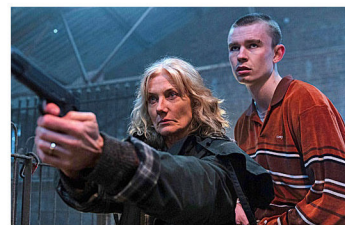
★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

**L**ittle Richard now seems like an unequivocally beloved figure of classic rock 'n' roll, and *I Am Everything* reminds us that he was also a revolutionary one. This joyful and fascinating documentary weaves Richard Penniman's life and career into the cultural fabric of America and tells the story of the seismic shift that occurred in the mid-century, when civil rights and the sexual revolution changed the country's foundations.

Little Richard, who died in 2020, is a charismatic presence in archival interviews and footage, while his wider impact is discussed by a series of experts. His legacy is not just as a Black performer but also as a queer one; he flirted with androgyny, and had sexual escapades with men and women. Much of his image and music had to be toned down to make it more palatable to his audience, although director Lisa Cortés' work reimagines many of his songs with their original, salacious lyrics intact.

Cortés is also prepared to showcase her subject's flaws, and Richard's internalised homophobia and subsequent embracing of Christian evangelism is an uncomfortable chapter in his story. Many of the queer scholars who contribute here are palpably disappointed when discussing this shift, but Little Richard learned to embrace his true self. The film, and the man's life, conclude on triumphant notes. **LEILA LATIF**

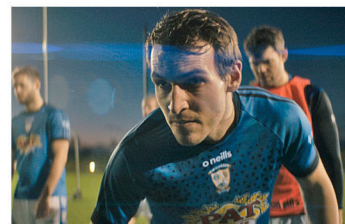
**THE VERDICT** A rock 'n' roll legend proves a complicated figure, but a fascinating documentary subject.



## LITTLE BONE LODGE 15

★★★★★ OUT 22 MAY DIGITAL

When brothers-on-the-run Jack (screenwriter Neil Linpow) and Matty (Harry Cadby) arrive at a remote Scottish farmhouse on a dark, stormy night, they don't expect any trouble, especially not from Mama (Joely Richardson), a kindly family woman who turns out to have some serious skills up her sleeve. Though we're in highly familiar home-invasion territory, strong direction from Matthias Hoene (*Cockneys vs. Zombies*, *The Warriors Gate*) and an emotionally complex script help to keep proceedings tense. But it's Linpow's desperate performance, bringing to mind a young Paddy Considine or Johnny Harris, that impresses most. **MATT GLASBY**



## LAKELANDS TBC

★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

There's a whiff of Brit classic *This Sporting Life* (1963) to this tale of a farmer's son in rural Ireland whose whole world revolves around his role on his local Gaelic football team. When a night out ends with a savage alleyway beating, Cian (*Smother's* Éanna Hardwicke) tries to shrug it off, only to gradually realise that his injuries might have a lasting impact on his footballing career. Writer/directors Robert Higgins and Patrick McGivney bring subtlety, empathy and a keen understanding of toxic male culture to their accomplished debut feature. Dramatically, alas, it's all rather wan and muted.

**NEIL SMITH**



**PAMFIR** 15

★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

On the eve of a pagan carnival, former smuggler Leonid (played by a powerful Oleksandr Yatsentyuk) returns from working abroad to his border village in western Ukraine. His wife and teenage son are delighted, but Leonid soon finds himself incurring the anger of the local crime boss. An impressive debut feature from Ukrainian writer/director Dmytro Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, this tragic crime drama draws on some familiar genre trappings, yet there is also a mythical dimension to the storytelling. It unfolds in a series of long, mobile takes, as *Pamfir* vividly conjures up a world drenched in corruption.

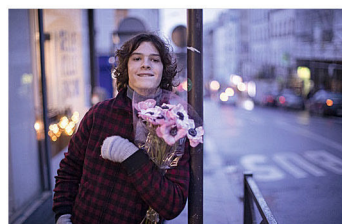
TOM DAWSON

**THE OTHER FELLOW** TBC

★★★★★ OUT 19 MAY

CINEMAS, DIGITAL

What's in a name? Several life stories, it turns out, as seen in this engaging, if diffuse, docu-survey of people called James Bond. Director Matthew Bauer introduces preachers, oilmen, inmates, doctors and more, many exhausted by endless puns about their moniker. But the playful investigation steadily deepens as people who deliberately chose the name emerge. While one woman renames her child Bond to elude an abusive ex, one oddly touching tale involves a man modelling himself on 007 after losing his father, gaining some quantum of solace in Bond's handle. **KEVIN HARLEY**

**WINTER BOY** TBC

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL MUBI

A gay teenager loses his dad before going on to find himself in this intense roman-à-clef from France's Christophe Honoré. *Winter Boy* is as graphic in its depictions of adolescent passion as it is when detailing a botched attempted suicide. This is clearly personal material for the *Sorry Angel* writer/director, whose own father died when Honoré was of a similar age to his precocious protagonist (newcomer Paul Kircher, son of *Three Colours: Red* star Irène Jacob). As excellent as Juliette Binoche is as the boy's grief-stricken mother, however, Honoré's film ultimately feels more like therapy than a fully realised drama. **NEIL SMITH**

**LOVE ACCORDING TO DALVA** 15

★★★★★ OUT 28 APRIL CINEMAS

Belgian filmmaker Emmanuelle Nicot's startling, powerful debut centres on Dalva (Zelda Samson), a 12-year-old girl who is taken to a children's home after being groomed and sexually abused by a man she calls Jacques. This man, though, is her father, and the impressionable Dalva cannot comprehend what is wrong with their relationship. It's a heart-breaking circumstance that's explored with care, the camera sticking close to Dalva as she comes to understand what has really happened to her. Nicot tells the story with compassion, while Samson is a magnetic, astonishing presence as Dalva. **JACK SHEPHERD**



Calling (out) the shots: Nina Menkes skewers cinema's objectification of women

**BRAINWASHED: SEX-CAMERA-POWER** 18

Frame and shame...

★★★★★ OUT 12 MAY CINEMAS

If the camera is predatory, then the culture is predatory,' insists filmmaker and activist Nina Menkes, who might forever change the way you watch movies with her fierce documentary dissecting how shot design objectifies women. Firing guilty 'male gaze' clips at us like bullets (*Vertigo*, *Phantom Thread*, *Le Mépris* and *Do the Right Thing* are just some of the 150-plus films to take a kicking), she gets granular about how both Hollywood and arthouse films position women.

Explaining her thesis in a compelling if slightly repetitive lecture, Menkes shows how (male) subject and (female) object divisions are created by framing, camera movement and lighting. If the format feels a bit Film-School Theory 101, it's rich in ideas, which fizz like fireworks in her shot-by-shot analyses of key sequences from classics such as *Pretty Baby*, *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Blade Runner*. Enlisting OG feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey and a host of female directors including Catherine Hardwicke, Julie Dash and Eliza Hittman, Menkes also takes aim at Hollywood employment discrimination.

She's on wobblier ground, however, when ignoring irony or nuance in arty, female-helmed fare such as *Titane* or *Lost in Translation*. But her critical rigour ensures that you will marvel at how *Raging Bull* lets men roar but mutes its women. **KATE STABLES**

**THE VERDICT** Menkes' dense and ambitious take-down of Hollywood's male gaze is a theory-crammed eye-opener.



# THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE

PG

‘Shroom patrol...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Bringing the world’s most recognisable video-game characters back to movies is an intimidating task after the failure of the 1993 attempt. But Illumination and Nintendo’s animated gamble mostly sticks the landing, with directors Aaron Horvath and Michael Jelenic delivering a fun take on the moustachioed siblings.

Wisely sidestepping accent issues, Mario (Chris Pratt) and Luigi (Charlie Day) are down-on-their-luck Brooklyn plumbers. When opportunity knocks in the form of a burst water main, they seize the chance to be heroes, only to fall through magic portals into a mysterious kingdom.

As Mario sets off to save Luigi from Bowser (Jack Black), familiar faces emerge. Toad (Keegan-Michael Key) brings some welcome humour, while scene stealer Princess Peach (Anya Taylor-Joy) benefits from a subversion of the game’s damsel-in-distress trope. If that all sounds non-canon, fans needn’t panic; every frame brims with references to Mario lore. It’s just a shame the 92-minute runtime leaves little chance to linger as the story hurtles through locations, characters and story threads.

Seth Rogen’s Donkey Kong barely gets a look-in, but the Mario and Luigi relationship suffers most – meaning one particular pay-off doesn’t hit the required emotional beats. Still, with all signs pointing to a sequel, there’s plenty of Rainbow Road left to explore. **FAY WATSON**

**THE VERDICT** It needed more banana peel to ease the pace, but this is a faithful visit to the Mushroom Kingdom.



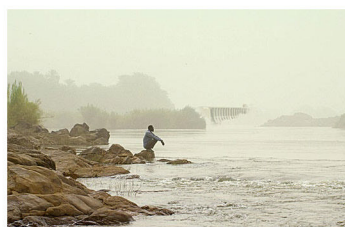
Plumb role: iconic character Mario is voiced by Chris Pratt



**THE OUTWATERS** IS  
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Shot for an estimated \$15,000, Robbie Banfitch’s found-footage cosmic horror is both an impressive achievement and an incredibly frustrating watch. When aspiring filmmaker Robbie (Banfitch) and his friends go missing while visiting the Mojave Desert to shoot a music video, his memory cards reveal strange noises, weird lights in the sky and an ominous figure with an axe. But after 50 minutes of ensnaring navel gazing, the ensuing hour-long freakout – though strikingly shot and soundtracked – becomes so fractured that it’s hard to comprehend, let alone care about, what really happens.

**MATT GLASBY**



**THE DAM** TBC  
★★★★★ OUT 12 MAY CINEMAS

Writer/director Ali Cherri’s feature debut introduces art, poetry and magic into the unassuming story of a brick maker, Maher (Maher El Khair), who lives among the ancient Sudanese pyramids. There’s a revolution raging in the capital city, but Maher is more concerned with building a giant, and eventually sentient, being out of mud from the banks of the Nile. Elegantly employing magic realism, the film slowly builds to a moving cascade of image, sound and imagination. *The Dam* works as an allegory of Sudan’s struggles, but finds its surest footing as a tribute to the tenacity of the human spirit.

**LEILA LATIF**



**JUDY BLUME FOREVER** TBC  
★★★★★ OUT NOW PRIME VIDEO

With an adap of *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*. hitting cinemas, this timely primer/celebration of the YA trailblazer’s output and influence is as spry as the featured octogenarian herself. Tracking her rise from bored housewife to the voice of adolescent confusion, filmmakers Davina Pardo and Leah Wolchok provide animated excerpts of Blume’s books, along with archival footage and a fan club of talking heads that proves unexpectedly moving. Blume’s own freedom, earned by her pen, is inspiring, while the exploration of conservative censorship seems more pertinent than ever.

**JANE CROWTHER**



**THE BLUE CAFTAN** TBC  
★★★★★ OUT 5 MAY CINEMAS

In this delicately crafted Moroccan chamber drama from writer/director Maryam Touzani, Mina (Lubna Azabal) and her master-tailor husband, Halim (Saleh Bakri), are a middle-aged couple who run a shop selling hand-made kaftans in the coastal town of Salé. The equilibrium of their tender relationship is, however, disrupted by their hiring of a handsome male apprentice (Ayoub Missioui), and the grave decline of Mina’s health. Sensually shot and subtly acted by its impressive cast, Touzani’s non-judgemental film quietly subverts expectations in order to challenge social conservatism. **TOM DAWSON**





## THE CORE 12

2003 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ None

How Jon Amiel, the director of Dennis Potter's TV masterpiece *The Singing Detective* (1986), wound up helming a starry (Hilary Swank, Aaron Eckhart, Delroy Lindo) but artless Hollywood disaster flick about a mission to restart the Earth's stalled core is a story *Screen* would love to hear. Sadly, it isn't one Paramount appears keen to tell, with this UHD ditching all pre-existing DVD extras in favour of... nothing whatsoever. The fact that the enhanced picture clarity makes the murky visual effects look even worse than ever is simply another reason to give this 4K do-over a miss. **ANTON VAN BEEK**



## MYSTERY TRAIN 15

1989 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★

Q&A, Featurettes, Booklet

In Jim Jarmusch's deceptively sharp reflection on storytelling, travel and Elvis myths, Japanese rock 'n' roll fans, an Italian widow and a bequipped Brit (Joe Strummer) visit a rundown hotel; a bone-dry comedy of miscommunication and displacement steadily emerges. Between Tom Waits' DJ, Cinqué Lee/Screamin' Jay Hawkins' hotel double act, Rufus Thomas' cameo and Robby Müller's lushly scuffed images, Jarmusch forsakes obvious tourist destinations, emphasising the overlooked and offbeat to alluring effect. Jarmusch's fan Q&A features alongside Criterion's gorgeous transfer. **KEVIN HARLEY**



## THREE COLOURS TRILOGY 15

Capturing the flag...

1993-94 ★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS, 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Documentary, Making of, Featurettes, Short films, Cards, Booklet

To make a single entry in the *Three Colours Trilogy* would be impressive enough. But when watched as a whole, Krzysztof Kieslowski's accomplishment feels miraculous. The stories overlap in elegant ways that enhance each film – and though they span different countries and genres, they seem perpetually in conversation with one another and open to myriad interpretations.

The titular colours are inspired by France's flag and the foundational ideals it represents. The first entry, 1993's *Blue* (symbolising liberty), centres on a woman (Juliette Binoche) whose world is torn apart when her husband and daughter are killed in a car accident. Next up, Julie Delpy stars in *White* (equality) as Dominique, who leaves her mild-mannered husband Karol (Zbigniew Zamachowski), sending him into a spiral of despair and eventual rebirth. And 1994's trilogy-closer *Red* (fraternity) is about the connection forged between a young model (Irène Jacob) and a reclusive retired judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant). While the final entry may not strike as much of an immediate impact, it boasts an astonishing ending that reframes the entire saga.

Following the trilogy's cinema reissue, Curzon's seven-disc set includes each film in 4K UHD (and on BD), plus 12 short films, a 2005 Kieslowski doc, five art cards and a 32-page booklet featuring a fresh interview with Delpy. **LEILA LATIF**

**THE VERDICT** The final films of the late, great *Kieślowski* are individual marvels that add up to a collective masterpiece.



## REPULSION 15

1965 ★★★★★ OUT 22 MAY BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Documentaries, Booklet

Still casting its long, roiling shadow over such psychological horror films as *His House* and *Last Night in Soho*, Roman Polanski's first English-language movie puts Carol (Catherine Deneuve), a Belgian manicurist, alone in a Kensington flat and then resides in her head as she undergoes a breakdown. Clocks tick, floors crack, hands clutch from walls... Meanwhile, Carol's fear of/desire for men and sex, though filtered through the male gaze, is presented in an empathetic rather than misogynist light. Strong extras imported from Criterion's US edition. **JAMIE GRAHAM**



## THE THREE MUSKETEERS 12

1973 ★★★★★ OUT 8 MAY

DVD, BD, DK UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurettes

Richard Lester's bawdy take on Alexandre Dumas' classic 17th-century French swashbuckler gets the 4K treatment (as does '74 sequel *The Four Musketeers*, available separately). The casting is superb: Oliver Reed, a boyish Michael York, plus able support from Charlton Heston, Raquel Welch, Faye Dunaway and even Spike Milligan. But this madcap tale, originally pitched as a vehicle for The Beatles, has aged badly. Playing like a *Carry On*, it lacks the charm of Lester's earlier Fab Four films, *Help!* and *A Hard Day's Night*. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



**HOUDINI** U

1953 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Gallery

Given how much it diverges from actual events, 'biopic' feels like the wrong word to use when discussing this cinematic account of the life of legendary escapologist Harry Houdini. All the same, while George Marshall's (*The Blue Dahlia*, *Destry Rides Again*, *How the West Was Won*) film is mostly pure fiction (it even changes the circumstances of Houdini's death), the magical pairing of Tony Curtis and his then wife, Janet Leigh, as Harry and Bess Houdini brings a touch of star power and emotional veracity to the love story at the heart of this amiable Technicolor confection. Meagre extras.

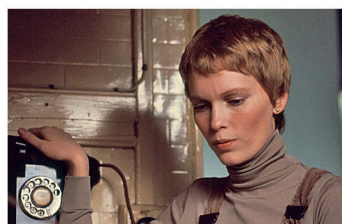
ANTON VAN BEEK

**NAKED LUNCH** 1S

1991 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Making of, Featurettes, Galleries, Poster, Lobby cards, Book

Not hard to see why David Cronenberg's adap of William S. Burroughs' 1959 novel bombed at the box office: it's as surreal and uncomfortable as the source material. But once you get beneath the unsettling surface of this tale of pest exterminator William Lee (Peter Weller), there's a sharply observed, Kafkaesque sensory feast to enjoy. Maddening and entrancing in equal measure, its full-bore commitment to weirdness more than earns it enduring cult-classic status. New 4K restoration plus fresh chats with key players. **LEILA LATIF**

**FULL CIRCLE: THE HAUNTING OF JULIA** 1S

1978 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD, DIGITAL EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Featurettes, Stills gallery, Booklet

Richard Loncraine's long-unavailable adaptation of Peter Straub's superior ghost novel finally materialises in 4K. Like *Don't Look Now*, it's a goosebump-prickling affair, heavy with grief for a lost child. And like *Rosemary's Baby*, it skilfully uses Mia Farrow's fragile strength and ethereal quality – she excels as a bereaved mother plagued by glimpses of a ghost girl. The producers wanted a more overt horror movie, and *Omen*-style killings were bizarrely drafted in. But it's the final shot, classy and composed, that most chills. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**RED EYE** 12

2005 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Making of, Featurettes, Gag reel

Rachel McAdams becomes ensnared in fellow air passenger Cillian Murphy's assassination plot in Wes Craven's slick thriller. Though a more successful non-horror outing than Craven's *Music of the Heart* (1999), *Red Eye* largely faded from view after a 2006 DVD, denied a Blu-ray release on either side of the Atlantic. As much as the visual upgrade offered by this UHD is greatly appreciated, equally welcome is an accompanying Blu-ray that not only ports over archival DVD extras, but adds a new commentary and a previously unreleased 2005 interview with the late Craven. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

The waiting room at the ferry terminal is rather basic

**LOCAL HERO** 12A

An American in parish...

1983 ★★★★★ OUT 19 MAY CINEMAS

Even upon its release in 1983, *Local Hero* felt like a throwback – a comedy with heart and poignancy, whimsy and a touch of mysticism, qualities that had critics comparing it to Powell and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going!* and Alexander Mackendrick's *Whisky Galore!* This 40th-anniversary big-screen rerelease only accentuates its old-school charms.

It's the tale of a young American executive (*Animal House*'s Peter Riegert) from a Texas oil company who's sent to a Scottish fishing village to buy up the area for the construction of a refinery. Keeping the ecological concerns low in the mix, it instead gives us a colourful portrait of a ragged, endearingly hospitable community – one that doesn't mount the expected David vs. Goliath battle but instead grasps at the millions on offer. Likewise, Burt Lancaster's head-honcho oilman, Felix Happer, is not the obligatory ogre but a likeably bonkers chap, besotted with the stars and sky.

An intimate movie, *Local Hero* came with big expectations given it was Scottish writer/director Bill Forsyth's follow-up to *Gregory's Girl* (1980) and producer David Puttnam's chaser to *Chariots of Fire* (1981). It wears the pressure lightly, managing a delicate balance of laughs and pathos that's neatly captured by Mark Knopfler's debut film score, which ranges from finger-picked guitar to Vangelis-like electronic rhapsody at the sight of misty mountains. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

**THE VERDICT** You'd do well to escape the daily hustle and bustle with this gentle, life-affirming comedy drama.



It dawned on Bunk and McNulty that neither of them had the car keys



## CLASSIC TV

# THE WIRE

Inner-city workings...

2002-08 AVAILABLE ON DVD, BD, DIGITAL, NOW

**W**e were newspaper reporters, novelists. And somehow... we got hold of an HBO drama and they let us run it for five years,' remarks *The Wire* creator David Simon. The series he and his team produced went far beyond the 'anti-cop show' originally pitched to HBO, subverting traditional expectations of episodic television in favour of something more akin to a grand Dickensian novel with its multiple POVs and broad socio-economic scope.

A former crime reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, Simon gained his first taste of the TV industry when his 1991 non-fiction book *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* became the basis for NBC's celebrated police drama *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-99). When that show came to an end, Simon pitched HBO a miniseries based on *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*, the 1997 non-fiction book he co-authored with retired Baltimore police detective Ed Burns.

Broadcast in 2000, *The Corner* cemented Simon's position within the industry, picking up three Emmy awards along the way. It's not hard, then, to see why HBO would be interested in commissioning a show that (on paper, anyway) appears to be a mix of those earlier productions: a long-form crime drama drawn

from Simon's journalistic experience of Baltimore's drug markets. However, for Simon and co-writer/producer Burns, that first season was just the tip of an iceberg that would eventually take in every echelon of urban America's societal malaise – from the destruction of the working class to local politics, public-school systems and the media. Or, as actor John Doman puts it, 'I think *The Wire* really tore the cover off an American city and showed that, for many people, the American dream was dead.'

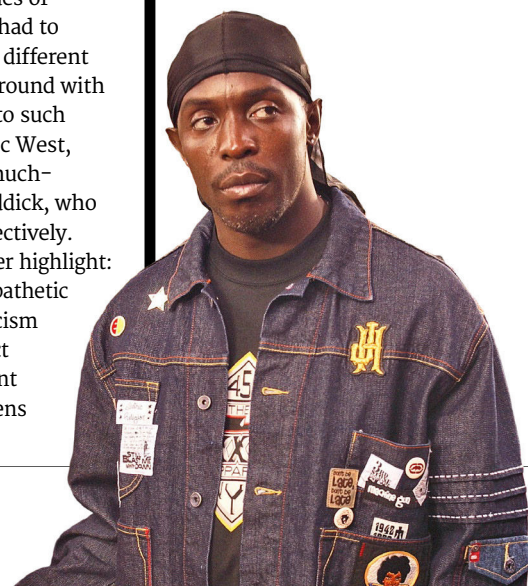
As well as disrupting conventional modes of televisual storytelling ('The first thing we had to do was teach folks to watch television in a different way,' claims Simon), *The Wire* also broke ground with its diverse casting, introducing audiences to such extraordinary talents as Idris Elba, Dominic West, Clarke Peters, Michael B. Jordan and the much-missed Michael K. Williams and Lance Reddick, who passed away in 2021 and March 2023 respectively.

For all involved, *The Wire* remains a career highlight: a complex, sprawling, yet intimate and empathetic televisual masterpiece whose scathing criticism of institutional failings and how they impact ordinary people remains as painfully relevant today as it was when the show left our screens 15 years ago. **ANTON VAN BEEK**



### OMAR LITTLE

As tough with drug dealers as he was tender with his boyfriend, openly gay Black stick-up man Omar Little is arguably *The Wire*'s most iconic character. Brilliantly brought to life by the late Michael K. Williams, Omar is the embodiment of the show's moral complexity and desire to subvert tropes.



HBO, PAUL SCHIRALDI PHOTOGRAPHY





# EXTRAS



## TOYS/COLLECTIBLES LEGO DISNEY 100 MINIFIGURES

OUT 1 MAY

Celebrate Disney's centenary with some blind-bag fun-slash-potential disappointment. Available in sealed mystery bags are 18 new minifigures based on characters from a century of Mousery – including one of Uncle Walt's first-borns, Oswald. It's a lucky (rabbit) dip, though probably not too hard to tell if those are Stitch's ears or Mickey's pointy apprentice hat when you're crinkling different bags. Take a little look at [lego.com](https://www.lego.com).



## TOYS/COLLECTIBLES LEGO INDIANA JONES SETS

OUT NOW

The hero is back, to quote the *Temple of Doom* poster – though it's Indy's first and third adventures being rebuilt here. *Fighter Plane Chase* sees our man and his dad on the run in a vintage convertible (fiery tunnel not included). *Escape from the Lost Tomb* offers snakes, hidden passages and giant statues, but it's the other *Raiders* set that's the biggie: *Temple of the Golden Idol* is a 1,545-piece dioramic tribute to Indy's iconic introduction, complete with boulder, fertility idol and mini Alfred Molina. No time to argue, get to [lego.com](https://www.lego.com)!

## COLLECTIBLE BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER TAROT DECK

OUT NOW

Sunnydale's denizens get carded in this lushly illustrated take on the traditional tarot deck. All the main players are assigned apt roles from the Major Arcana – Buffy is The Emperor, Willow The Magician; Xander is, of course, The Fool. The 78-card deck is accompanied by a 128-page guidebook that'll soon have you slayin' em with your readings. Gellar load of this at [insighteditions.com](https://insighteditions.com).



## COLLECTIBLES FUNKO POP! ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

OUT NOW

If, as reported, there are 240 characters in the *Spider-Verse* sequel, you may need to find an alt-universe in which to store all the potential merch. Get your collection off to a swinging start with these vinyl figures, featuring bobble-headed takes on Spider-Man 2099, Spider-Gwen, Spider-Woman, Spider-Man India, Spider-Byte, Medieval Vulture and Miles Morales, who's got his own jumbo-sized variant. Wait, could Funko Spidey be an actual thing in the movie?! That would be... amazing. Check out your friendly neighbourhood [funko.com](https://funko.com).

MATTHEW LEYLAND







Admit it: you have the main Indiana Jones theme tune in your head right now

## CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

JOHN WILLIAMS CONCORD

**W**hen John Williams scored George Lucas and Steven Spielberg's 1981 period action adventure, his goal was clear. He wanted a theme that sounded 'inevitable', like Indiana Jones walking back through Marion's door: a tune so simple, so sure, its inclusion would seem predestined.

True to prolific form, Williams offered two options to director Spielberg, who chose wisely: he took both. Inspired by Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Golden Age symphonies, the result made *The Raiders March* one of cinema's most infectious themes. But this was just the entrée for one of Williams' finest hours, a sumptuous score that maps its many indelible melodies on to storytelling with dynamic dash, panache and atmosphere.

Essentially, it's not just the tunes, honey – it's the usage. Indy's thrusting 'A' theme first emerges as Jones swings out to the seaplane, followed by the more furrowed 'B' theme for his encounter with Reggie the snake. Deftly, Williams connects one cue with reckless heroism and the other with setbacks or struggle. Across the movie, he goes on to serve ingenious variations on these well-established examples, before the 'A' theme blossoms with full gusto when Indy boards the submarine.

After the scuttling suspense and shock jabs of the opening jungle music, other emergent cues include Marion's lush theme, rising like a memory from

*A Thought for Marion*. Echoing Max Steiner's *Now, Voyager* (1942) score via Williams' own *Superman* love themes, the result distils *Raiders'* retro-modern romanticism beautifully.

The menacing Nazi themes add music to biff a baddie to, while adjacent peaks testify to Williams' flair for action. *The Basket Game* seems like a throwaway frolic, until you realise how perfectly Williams paces the swordsman punchline. *Desert Chase* is thrilling, matching Indy's improvised methods with precision in its mounting pace.

Better still, Williams' facility for suggesting awesome spectacle in sound colours the Ark themes. These quasi-biblical cues merge with themes related to artefacts and medallions to heart-in-mouth effect for *The Map Room: Dawn*, a choral evocation of wonder and dread. Later, *The Miracle of the Ark* bridges *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*'s climax with Harry Potter's dark wizardry in its ceremonial splendour and lashing terror.

Not that comparisons diminish *Raiders*. Even if Williams lost the Oscar to *Chariots of Fire*, *Raiders* remains a full-spread showcase of his controlled range and storytelling instincts, thematic focus and melodic punch. 'That damn music follows me everywhere,' quipped Harrison Ford, honouring Williams at 2016's AFI Life Achievement gala. With scoring this invincible, this indelible, surely that's inevitable. **KEVIN HARLEY**



Four on the floor and Flo on song...



### JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4

★★★★★

Composers Tyler Bates/Joel J. Richard rise to the aggressively expansive occasion for Keanu's cataclysmic brawler. A few mood-setting cues aside, *Wick 4*'s orchestral synth-rock score marshals western majesty, desert sweep, galvanic beats, convulsive guitars and more to whiplash effect. Punk-ish covers of *Nowhere to Run* and *Paint It Black* add feral gusto, while Rina Sawayama's *Eye for an Eye* drips style and swagger: St. Vincent doing Bond is the rough gist.



### A GOOD PERSON

★★★★★

Florence Pugh turns singer-songwriter for Zach Braff's drama, which serves up two separate soundtracks. If Pugh's *I Hate Myself* lands thuddingly, *The Best Part* shows grace and poised promise, the star's vocal natural and restrained. Moonlighting from *The National*, Bryce Dessner delivers a fitfully effective chamber-piece score. While the piano motifs sometimes verge on textbook plaintive, dips into abstraction and desolation enrich the circling melodies, delicately evoking a life locked in repetition.





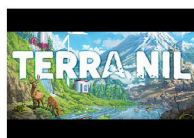
Recent thumb-twiddlers...



**GRIMGRIMOIRE:  
ONCEMORE**

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** PS4/5, SWITCH  
An unlikely candidate for a remaster, this largely forgotten PS2-era real-time strategy (from *13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim* developer Vanillaware) casts you as a trainee witch who must summon armies of familiars to save her magic school from invading demons. Its crisp 2D art is appealing, though it quickly grows repetitive.



**TERRA NIL**

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** MOBILE, PC  
This 'reverse city builder' asks you to transform patches of wasteland into self-sustaining ecosystems – placing structures and machines to change the environment and climate before recycling them to remove any evidence of human involvement. It's fascinating to see the fruits of your labour, but the clean-up process is tedious.



'All I said was the original version was a bit better...'

## GAMES

# RESIDENT EVIL 4

### Return of the possessed...

★★★★☆ **OUT NOW** PC, PS4/5, XBOX SERIES S/X

**T**he rev of a chainsaw – wielded by a man with a blood-smeared hessian sack over his face – might not seem the stuff of nostalgia. But the blistering pre-title set-piece of Capcom's latest remake conjures fond memories of the 18-year-old original.

Even for veteran players, the village-set opening retains its intensity: offsetting floppy-fringed protagonist Leon S. Kennedy's ability to move, fire and switch weapons more easily, his parasitically controlled pursuers are more aggressive and persistent. It's a relief, then, when the church bell finally tolls and they (literally) down tools – not least because our hero's

enquiry as to whether they're going to bingo proves the campy humour of the original has been left intact.

This safety-first approach has its advantages (the backs-to-the-wall barn siege has been sensibly left untouched) but occasionally feels too timid. Fresh additions aren't always successful, either. While Leon's combat knife can now be used to parry attacks or quickly stab opponents when grabbed, saving you from mashing buttons to wriggle free, you'll regularly find yourself spending a chunk of cash on repairs or acquiring durability boosts.

There's some judicious streamlining in the castle-set middle act, though two standout sequences, including one of the original's most terrifying episodes, have been jettisoned. But elsewhere, it cleverly uses your knowledge of the original against you, shrewdly remixing encounters to keep you on your toes. Does it unseat the original? Not quite – but with action of almost peerless variety and pacing, it's a frequently exhilarating companion piece to a classic.

**CHRIS SCHILLING**

## DEAD ISLAND 2

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES



Like a zombie that just won't die, Dambuster's sequel has somehow survived nine years in production hell; the Nottingham studio is the third team to have taken over development. At times, it feels like the sunk-cost fallacy, as you're funnelled through an LA setting that's less a sandbox than an undead obstacle course. But if the combat is messy, that's not necessarily a negative: the gore gives a real sense of impact to your attacks, producing some of the most effectively realised splatter yet seen in a video game. **CS**

## PARANORMASIGHT

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** MOBILE, PC, SWITCH



Subtitled *The Seven Mysteries of Honjo*, this riveting visual novel centres on a set of curse stones that can resurrect the dead – albeit only when powered up by human sacrifice. The twisty plot follows several characters, from a grieving mother willing to do whatever it takes to reunite with her son to a pair of detectives on the hunt for a killer. It's overly talky in places, but with atmosphere to burn, some ingenious fourth-wall-breaking puzzles and a clutch of barnstorming shocks, this occult chiller delivers. **CS**

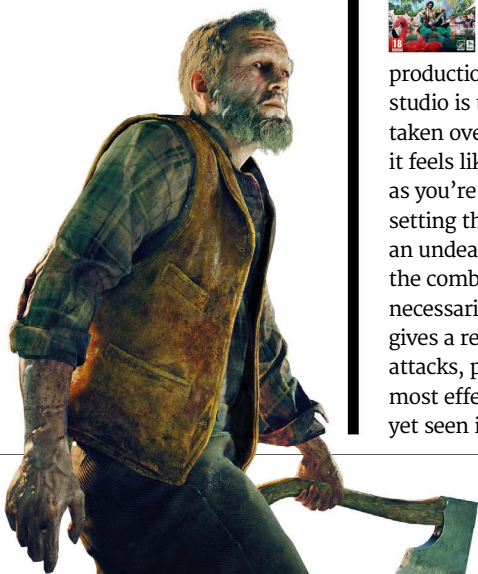
## STORYTELLER

★★★★☆

**OUT NOW** PC, SWITCH



Argentinian developer Daniel Benmergui has conceived a clever puzzle game that invites you to fill comic-book panels to satisfy the demands of a story. Combinations of characters and backdrops have different effects: dragging one character onto a headstone kills them off, but another won't suffer heartbreak unless you've married them off first. It doesn't quite push the boundaries of its concept as much as you'd hope, but the appeal of your narrative tinkering takes a while to wear off. **CS**







Fandom, fursonas,  
the First Order...



FANS

★★★★★

Though often maligned in pop culture and fiction, fandom presents a complex face in Michael Bond's scholarly but readable socio-psychological treatise. Linking Dickens/Harry Potter and Billies Holiday/Eilish, Bond scrutinises fandom's history, honouring its generosity while noting its murkier side. Fan cultures can help the marginalised, he suggests; one-sided relationships can be positive. 'Fursonas' (Google if needed) also figure among his many fringe-based focuses. Even on darker fan cultures, Bond's reasoned insights reach beyond salacious outrage to make keen points about the shared urge to belong.

KEVIN HARLEY



STAR WARS TIMELINES

★★★★★

A chronological churn through seven Wars-torn eras, from Early History (ie yonks before even Yoda was born) to The Rise of the First Order. Even by DK standards it's a dense read, and at times a disorientating one; following some event paths is like launching your eyeballs along an especially bendy Hot Wheels track. Eminently browsable, it encompasses all media (films, animation, theme parks), although *Andor* S1 is strangely AWOL – maybe it'll feature in the next edition that's sure to follow before long, given the exponential growth of the post-Disney canon. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



BOOKS

## DID I EVER TELL YOU THIS?

★★★★★ SAM NEILL PENGUIN

**P**art career memoir, part cancer diary, this engaging autobiography was written while Neill was battling his own personal velociraptor: a T-cell lymphoma so life-threatening he was tempted to subtitle the book *Notes from a Dying Man*. 'I'm crook,' he sighs at the beginning of a tome in which nostalgic reflections on his Kiwi childhood and self-deprecating anecdotes from his years in the limelight come peppered with bulletins from his chemo-dominated present.

It's hardly surprising, then, that the result at times seems, in his own words, 'somewhat flung together'. But if you're happy to indulge a few digressions on wine-making, sheep-rearing and the agonies of constipation, there's much to enjoy within

its 400-odd pages. Neill isn't the kind to analyse acting; he is, by his own admission, 'shallow as a puddle'. But he's ready to say it as he sees it, even if it means dissing the occasional co-star (Harvey Keitel was 'truculent' throughout *The Piano*), remembering Robin Williams as 'the loneliest man on a lonely planet', or gleefully recalling that time Hugh Grant called *Four Weddings* 'a piece of complete crap.'

His 007 screen test barely merits a paragraph ('I had no desire to be the one Bond that no one liked'), while one rather throwaway chapter does little more than list all the female stars he's worked with. But however haphazard this volume sometimes feels, you're always glad to be in its author's genial company. **NEIL SMITH**

### BFI FILM CLASSICS: ERASERHEAD

★★★★★

CLAIRE HENRY BFI/BLOOMSBURY



Henry's monogram primarily focuses on how cultural critics have interpreted the themes of David Lynch's 1977 surrealist masterpiece. Though there are no original words from the auteur, quotes from other interviews are used to contextualise Henry's analysis. Exactly how Lynch created that baby remains a mystery, but there is a chapter dedicated to the creature's deeper meaning, and another on how the film became a midnight-movie hit. Interesting, if clinical. **JACK SHEPHERD**

### BFI FILM CLASSICS: ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

★★★★★

ROBERT B. RAY, CHRISTIAN KEATHLEY BFI/BLOOMSBURY



This stealthy dissection of Alan J. Pakula's seminal political thriller promises at the outset to 'imitate' reporters Bernstein and Woodward by 'asking questions and taking notes and making connections'. Job done. Strong on context (from 70s Hollywood to Watergate itself), the book really takes flight with its often shot-by-shot analysis, which places everything from bicycle wheels to banjos under the microscope. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

### QUEER FILM CLASSICS: MIDNIGHT COWBOY

★★★★★

JON TOWLSON MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS



Is John Schlesinger's 1969 Oscar-winner queer? John Wayne thought so (his notorious remarks are included here). But Towlson is more inclined to view it as 'a transitional work' – 'a step in the right direction' towards queer cinema that paved the way for *Brokeback Mountain* and *My Own Private Idaho*. It's a persuasive rereading, albeit one that seems unduly lenient towards its characters' homophobic language and attitudes. **NEIL SMITH**



# THE BUTTE

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTED FROM MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...





# IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH  
PLANE



**Q** In *Plane*, Gerard Butler's hero pilots a commercial airline with no doors to take off on a mud track. Plane crazy?

**A** Jon Sinclair, commercial airline pilot and lecturer, University of West London

In the real world the crew would stay well clear of any active storm. After the plane is struck by lightning, they have an avionics failure and are then just powered by batteries – I can't see how this could happen. On landing they could have survived but it's hard to say the effect it would have had on the plane; there would have been damage to the left wing as it hit the trees and also the muddy track could have damaged the landing gear.

Now for the escape: in normal conditions, an MD-80 would have a take-off run of just over 7,000 feet (over half the length of the runways at Heathrow: 12,000 and 12,800). However, in the conditions here they would need a longer take-off run, due to the 'runway' condition and the extra drag created by not having the doors. The speed would vary depending on several conditions. On the one hand, the plane would be very light with so few passengers so would in normal conditions result in a take-off speed of around 130 mph. However, here we have the extra drag to overcome and the poor surface so the speed would need to be greater, possibly over 160 mph. I do not see how they would be able to take off.

They could take off with no doors – the only issue would be the extra drag, which would require a longer take-off run. Passengers would survive airborne without doors as the atmosphere's oxygen concentration is sufficient up to 10,000 feet. It would be very noisy and uncomfortable with all the wind entering the cabin. But would the landing gear be up to a take-off after the crash landing? Unlikely. Although the mud road in the movie would be slightly firmer than a field, it would not support the weight of a plane and as a result the landing gear could be damaged. Even if the landing gear looked OK it still might be damaged, so when they take off in the film it might not have been possible to retract the landing gear.

**PLANE IS ON DIGITAL, 4K UHD, BLU-RAY AND DVD NOW**

**VERDICT BOLLOCKS**

## ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies...  
WITH SPIDER-Y TITLES



01	<b>GARFIELD</b> 2004	\$203.2M
02	<b>MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS</b> 1995	\$106.3M
03	<b>CRAWL</b> 2019	\$91.5M
04	<b>PARKER</b> 2013	\$46.9M
05	<b>AMAZING GRACE</b> 2006	\$32.1M
06	<b>UNFRIENDED: DARK WEB</b> 2018	\$16M
07	<b>SWING KIDS</b> 1993	\$5.6M
08	<b>PETER'S FRIENDS</b> 1992	\$4.1M
09	<b>RADIOACTIVE</b> 2019	\$3.5M
10	<b>MILES AHEAD</b> 2015	\$3.5M

## ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA



**WHAT?** Meeting up with a cheating ex over dinner is cathartic for Dom and his meet-cute, Yas, in South London romcom *Rye Lane*.

**WHERE?** Il Giardino, 7 Blenheim Grove, London SE15 4QS

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Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at [totalfilm@futurenet.com](mailto:totalfilm@futurenet.com)



# TICKING TIME BOMBS IN MOVIES

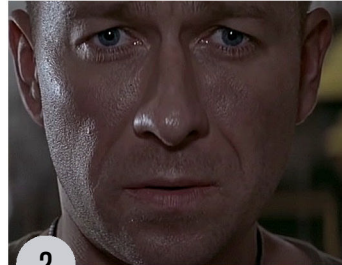
Second-guessing...



1

## GOLDFINGER

The usually cool James Bond (Sean Connery) is shaken and stirred at the sheer complexity of the nuclear device about to irradiate Fort Knox. Can he save the day? Luckily, a CIA boffin is on hand to intervene and flick the 'off' switch, with the timer naturally stopping at '007'.



2

## EVENT HORIZON

Smith (Sean Pertwee) ignores the evacuation order and frantically searches his beloved *Lewis and Clark* for a bomb left by a demonically possessed Dr. Weir. Good news: he finds it. Bad news: there's only five seconds on the clock. He slumps, crestfallen, accepting his fate.



3

## STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

After setting the *Enterprise*'s autodestruct, Kirk and crew evacuate just as the Klingons beam in. Commander Krue (Christopher Lloyd) hears the computer counting down; he realises it's a trap but can only scream, 'Get out!' too late.



4

## DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE

John McClane (Bruce Willis) and Zeus (Samuel L. Jackson) solve a classic kids puzzle to prevent a bomb going off – measuring exactly four gallons of water with a three- and a five-gallon jug. Admit it, you're doing it in your head now.



5

## THE X-FILES

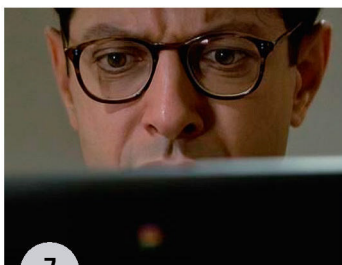
The FBI evacuates a federal building while a bomb specialist goes to work. But he subverts audience expectations by sitting down and... doing nothing. With his head in his hands, he lets the timer hit zero. The bomb explodes, killing him and destroying the building. Bleak.



6

## LETHAL WEAPON 3

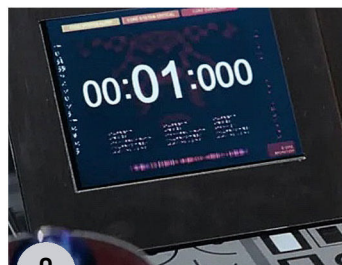
Playing on the classic trope of the amateur trying to disarm the bomb, Riggs' (Mel Gibson) tinkering only succeeds in drastically accelerating the digital countdown. He and Murtagh (Danny Glover) can only (literally) save the cat and escape as the building explodes behind them.



7

## INDEPENDENCE DAY

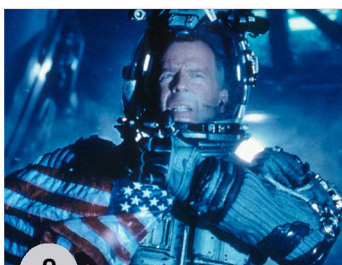
Jeff Goldblum's 'cable repairman' David Levinson uses his 90s laptop to decode an alien countdown that's using our own satellites against us. The timer reaches zero, signalling the start of an invasion taking out Earth's (well, America's) most cinematic buildings. 'Time's up.'



8

## GALAXY QUEST

Actors Jason Nesmith (Tim Allen) and Gwen DeMarco (Sigourney Weaver) try to prevent the core implosion of a real ship based on their fictional space soap opera. Their efforts are ineffective but the countdown stops at 00:01. Why? 'It always stops at one on the show.'



9

## ARMAGEDDON

Michael Bay's gung-ho cheese-fest uses a timer to signal the last moment an extinction-level asteroid can be destroyed. Bruce Willis' miner Harry Stamper signs off with a farewell to his daughter (Liv Tyler) before sacrificing himself by detonating the nuclear device.



10

## BATMAN: THE MOVIE

Not a clock but a rapidly burning fuse means Batman must dispose of an explosive at the pier, quickly. Cue a series of increasingly farcical elements getting in his way, including nuns, ducks and a marching band. 'Some days you just can't get rid of a bomb!' **PAUL TANTER**

Did we miss something? Let us know on [Twitter](#) @totalfilm



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## HINDSIGHT CORNER

**ANDY SERKIS**

STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI

**December 2017**

'The film is an emotional roller coaster as well as being a piece of excellent storytelling... The whole movie is a rich experience.'

**February 2023**

'When I went in to read *The Last Jedi*, I spent the first 30 pages thinking, "This is the most incredible character." Then I turned the page: "And then Snoke gets sliced in half." And I was gutted. Gutted.'

# FLOP CULTURE



## SAHARA

In 2005, this old-fashioned romp seemed to promise a new action-adventure franchise and star. Did it squander too much cash to break even?

### Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Action, adventure, buried treasure, romance, a hero named Dirk Pitt... With Matthew McConaughey's glowing teeth and co-star Penélope Cruz upfront, director Breck Eisner's adaptation of Clive Cussler's novel seemed to augur a new dawn for post-Indiana Jones family franchise fun.

### What went wrong?

Producer Philip Anschutz paid \$10m for the rights to Cussler's 18 Dirk Pitt novels, a sizeable sum but nothing compared to the money that leaked in production. An infamous exposé in the *Los Angeles Times* detailed epic amounts spent on 'local bribes' on location in Morocco, alongside 'courtesy payments', 'gratuities' and 'star perks'. A plane-crash scene shot for \$2m was also dumped, an example of profligacy that perhaps reflects director Breck Eisner's (*Thoughtcrimes*, *The Last Witch Hunter*) inexperience with tent-pole films. With production, marketing and screenwriter (10 of them) fees factored in, costs ran to approximately \$240m. Meanwhile, Cussler attempted to sue producers, claiming the production reneged on his right to creative

control. The producers counter-sued, arguing Cussler was uncooperative and obstructive. Somewhere in between, *The Guardian's* judgement of 'moderate' reflected the tone of critics' reviews. And McConaughey's six-pack and tan were not impressive enough to take up the slack with under-wowed audiences.

### Redeeming feature

Clint Mansell's rich, characterful score suggests he should do more 'busters, while Steve Zahn is a snappy sidekick.

### What happened next?

Lengthy court tussles continued between Cussler and Crusader Entertainment, culminating indecisively in 2013. McConaughey grinned through further years of struggle before the McConaissance, while Cruz rediscovered her form in *Volver*.

### Should it be remade?

Spielberg made it look easy, but this kind of semi-comic action-adventure can be a tough tonal balance to nail. And Cussler's novels (see also *Raise the Titanic*) are hardly the sturdiest of anchors. Let this tarnished treasure remain lost. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
\$160m	\$119.2m	2	★★★☆☆	38%



'No spoilers please, I'm only up to *Hawkeye* episode four...'



# IS IT JUST ME OR DO BLOCKBUSTERS REQUIRE TOO MUCH HOMEWORK?



JACK SHEPHERD  
@JACKJSHEPHERD

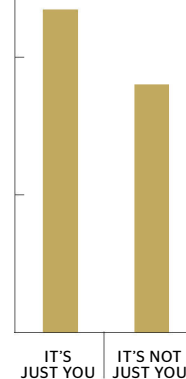
Marvel movies are meant to be an escape. A few hours of light relief; a chance to lose yourself in a universe where the good guys win and the villains (almost) always lose. Plant yourself in a comfy seat and tune out. Just enjoy Captain America punching a man with a red skull.

Of course, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has moved beyond that simple narrative thanks to various Avengers event movies. However, since 2019's *Endgame*, things have become more complicated. Gone are the days of a few cinema trips being enough to understand the larger story – now, you need to sink hours into various Disney+ series too.

*Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, for example, makes more sense after watching *WandaVision*, and even more sense after watching *Loki* and *What If...?*. To fully appreciate *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, you need to have seen everything from the MCU, two sets of Spider-Man movies, and have working knowledge of the *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* post-credits scene. *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*, which the critics agree is a slog, has already been made required viewing for multiple future Marvel projects.

Sadly, *Endgame*'s blockbusting triumph has led to other studios expecting the same commitment to their franchises. DC is launching *The Flash* later this year, bringing back Michael Keaton and Ben Affleck's Batmen, Michael Shannon's General

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THE TF STAFF  
VERDICT IS IN!



Zod and potentially Temuera Morrison's *Aquaman* character. If you didn't watch the SnyderVerse saga and Tim Burton's Bat-films, good luck. And even if you invest, James Gunn is restarting the whole DC thing soon anyway.

The same is happening beyond superheroes. The terrific *Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves* has a spin-off TV show confirmed. *Scream VI* requires watching, well, five other *Scream* movies (not least the fourth one, if you want to make sense of Hayden Panettiere's appearance). And sure, that's the nature of franchises. But as these series become bigger and more reliant on viewers being au fait with everything that came before, it's starting to feel like you have to do homework before you set foot in the multiplex... Or is it just me?



LAST TIME  
IS THE 'EMO  
PARKER' SCENE A  
SPIDER-CLASSIC?

VLADIMIR DUJIN  
That scene is simply awful.

GAVIN WYSE  
So bad it's good.

CROM ARTY  
It's neither as good as you think nor (anywhere near) as bad as its detractors think. *Spider-Man 3* is a great and underrated film, though.

STEPHEN HUTCHINGS  
Awful, just godawful!  
A scene like the Emo Parker scene should be nowhere near a comic-book film.



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# INTERMISSION

A WRITER TAKES PAUSE TO CONSIDER....

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and break-ups

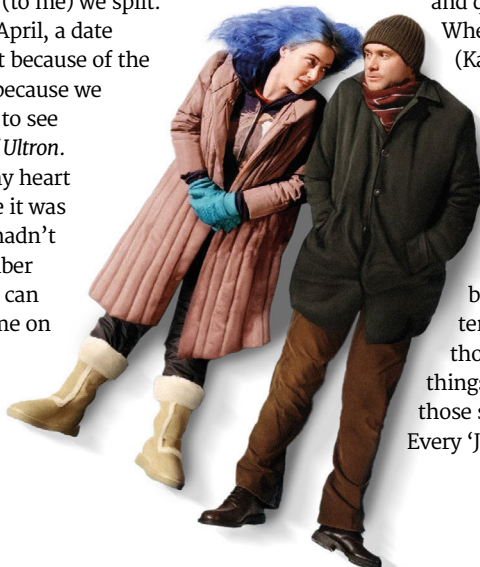


JOEL HARLEY  
@JOELHARLEY

It was a little after 3pm in Egypt, of all places. Laughter echoed through the cracked-ajar window of my hotel bedroom, accompanied by the sound of bare feet on poolside porcelain and the plop of distant dive-bombs. The low hum of the hotel air con fought to be heard over the racket outside and television inside. It hadn't occurred to me that closing the window might help the air con circulate, so I lay there, splayed on the bed, channelling *Apocalypse Now*.

It was May 2015, and I was at a Sharm El-Sheikh beach resort following a family wedding. After the lovely ceremony, we had flown to an all-inclusive beachside hotel. Looking out on the serene Red Sea, surrounded by vast dunes of nothing, this should have been a peaceful, happy time. Yet here I was, consumed by a deep funk. As a film nut, I probably would have laid in bed marathoning the hotel movie channel regardless, but this time I did so depressively, fighting away my own thoughts and memories.

Only weeks previous, the first relationship of my 28-year life had ended. We had been together for five years, cohabiting for four. Out of the blue (to me) we split. It ended on 23 April, a date I remember not because of the break-up, but because we were supposed to see *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. As she broke my heart (I told everyone it was mutual, but it hadn't been), I remember thinking, 'How can she do this to me on the day we're supposed to see *Age of Ultron*?'



I didn't see *Age of Ultron* for weeks after that, the unkindest cut of all.

As I lay on that hotel-room bed, *Ace Ventura* followed *The Number 23*, which followed *Kick-Ass 2*, a surprising Jim Carrey theme. This, in turn, was followed by Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* – my first exposure to the 2004 sci-fi romance.

I may not have been the first person to watch *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* after a break-up, but I fancied that I had

'How can she do this  
to me on the day we're  
supposed to see  
*Age of Ultron*?'

to be the first person to watch *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* after a break-up with a dyed-hair redhead while also being named Joel. There was even a resemblance, in Jim Carrey's messy dark hair, five o'clock stubble and quiet, sullen temperament.

When Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet) called him 'Joely,' I felt chills.

In Joel Barish's misery, sobbing as he drove through the streets of New York, I saw my own loss and anger reflected. In their relationship, I recognised the good and the bad, both in Joel and Clementine's tender moments, and in their thoughtless, casual cruelties. I saw things I had said and done as well as those she had said and done to me. Every 'Joely' cut to the core.

Had I been in love with my Clementine, or just the idea of my Clementine? Just as she'd begged Joel not to at the start of their relationship, I wondered whether I myself had been guilty of putting that pixie dream girl on a pedestal. Lonely and unfulfilled like that Joel, had this one pinned all his hopes for the future on a clearly incompatible relationship? Another question: if I could wipe all traces of my Clementine from my mind, would I? The good times now tainted by the bad, I probably would have. As it argued maybe I shouldn't, the film's message reverberated.

Here was I, cocooned in bed, simultaneously remembering and trying to forget, like Joel Barish during *The Procedure*. The film's recurring motif – the ocean and the beach – also reflected my own surroundings. I found similarities even in the differences, exchanging snow for sand, cold for heat. It was a film that felt tailor-made for me at that point in time, whether I wanted to hear it or not.

As the end credits rolled, I staggered out of bed and pulled open the curtains, Beck's *Everybody's Got to Learn Sometime* playing over the film and my contemplation. Past the pool and resort gardens, I regarded the setting sun and the rolling ocean. I pulled on clothes for the first time that day and headed out to rejoin the world, starting with a walk on the beach.

Real life doesn't follow so simple a narrative that I was OK after that – I wasn't and wouldn't be for a while – but it was a solid foundation, and the catharsis I needed. Now 36, I'm engaged to marry the actual love of my life. I look back on that relationship, with time and distance having faded both good and bad memories, no real feeling either way, no *Procedure* required.

I rewatched the film again recently and was shocked to find that I didn't recognise Joel, or Clementine, or myself in any of it.



## BEHIND THE SCENES

**R**uth E. Carter made history in 2019 when she became the first African American artist to win an Academy Award for Costume Design. In March, she did it again. Now counting two Oscars under her belt for both *Black Panther* movies, Carter is publishing a book covering a whole career of landmark costume design – including 12 collaborations with director Spike Lee from *School Daze* to *Chi-Raq*. ‘I could have gone on and on,’ she laughs. ‘It could have been an encyclopaedia!’

### How would you describe your role in simple terms?

A costume designer is kind of a magician. They take an actor and bring them into a character through clothes, texture, colour and fabric. They help actors become different people.

### What is the biggest misconception about your job?

That we sew! Costume designers *design*. People always ask me about fashion too. I grew up loving dressing up and having dolls, but I was an anti-fashion kid. I took a pair of scissors to everything in my mom’s dresser! I’m inspired by fashion, but that’s not what I do.

### What’s been your most memorable moment of your career so far?

I think being at the pyramids in Egypt with Denzel Washington for [1992’s] *Malcolm X*. I’ll never forget that. Young filmmakers like Ryan Coogler still talk to me about how important that film was to them. It’s a wonderful feeling. It’s kind of like passing the torch.

### What’s been your biggest challenge?

When I started out, Spike [Lee] was the director, the producer and the writer. I had one boss. But as I grew into Hollywood it started to seem more like a committee. I needed to play politics, which wasn’t easy for me. The size of the productions can be a challenge too. When I made *Black Panther*, it was like running a city. If I wanted to tweak the costume for the Dora Milaje [Wakanda’s all-female special forces], I had to talk to tribal printing experts, armourers and armies of craftspeople... It was a huge job.



# GIVING CREDIT

Saluting the behind-the-scenes talent making movie magic.

RUTH E. CARTER COSTUME DESIGNER



Ruth worked with Eddie Murphy on 2019 comedy drama *Dolemite Is My Name*

### What’s the best thing about your job?

Seeing the transformation. Some of these actors are powerful – you can see it in their face, you can see it in their body language as they walk around the room – and you can actually see them finding the character in real time. That’s when the magic happens.

### And the worst thing?

The worst thing is that you love it so much that you forget all about life. You forget to exercise. You forget to eat right. You forget to get married, you forget to have kids and you forget about your family, because you’re so engrossed in this. You give so much to this industry, and the industry doesn’t give back to everyone.

‘I was an anti-fashion kid. I took a pair of scissors to everything in my mom’s dresser!’

### If someone wants to get into costume design, what should they do?

You have to be able to make that sacrifice, for a start. You have to be at peace with working for 12 hours every day, going home, waking up and coming back again. And you have to persevere. The best advice I was given was just to keep ploughing on through. This isn’t an instant-gratification job and you have to put the work in.

### What’s been your proudest moment in the industry so far?

Getting the Oscar was a wonderful moment, but my proudest moment was on [1999 period film] *Amistad* with Steven Spielberg. There were very few photographs of the time period so I really had to go back through Black art history to find that film. When I look at that film now, I still feel like it has the texture and the colours and the look of an art piece. I’m very proud of that.

PAUL BRADSHAW

**THE ART OF RUTH E. CARTER IS AVAILABLE ON 25 MAY**



# JAVIER BARDDEM

From Spain to outer space...

## LISTEN TO MOTHER

When Spain's Javier Bardem took up acting, his actor/activist mother advised him: 'If you're going to dedicate yourself to this craft, respect it deeply for the surname you're carrying.' Born in 1969 to a family of many struggling actors, Bardem learnt the value of commitment early. After time as a painter and rugby player, a role as a strapping hunk in Bigas Luna's *Jamón Jamón* (1992, opposite future wife Penélope Cruz) showed acting was in his genes.

## NOT SO MACHO

Offered tough-guy roles, Bardem preferred to stretch himself and challenge macho stereotypes. After the vigorous sexual energy of his early turns, he brought restraint to the wheelchair-using, sexually awkward cop in Pedro Almodóvar's *Live Flesh* (1997). Notching up 20-plus Spanish credits and numerous awards, he then became the first Spaniard to bank a Best Actor Oscar nom for his soulful lead in Julian Schnabel's biographical drama *Before Night Falls* (2000).



## HAIR-RAISER

Having once declared himself less interested in blockbusters than Coen brothers films, Bardem banked a Coens character for the ages, acing an Oscar-winning study in chilling composure as *No Country for Old Men*'s (2007) bobbed death-dealer Anton Chigurh. Another stealthy bad-hair day followed courtesy of *Skyfall*'s (2012) silky cyberterrorist Raoul Silva, before *Pirates of the Caribbean*'s shock-haired Salazar (2017) gave Bardem the chance to ham it up.

## KING OF THE RAVES

*Mother!* (2017) and *Escobar* (2017) aside, Bardem has latterly brought a game deftness to lighter genre jobs. 'I'm an entertainer,' he says, and he showed as much with *Being the Ricardos* (2021) Desi Arnaz and *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*'s (2022) magician. Post-POTC, he'll return to the sea for *The Little Mermaid*'s King Triton. *Dune: Part Two* promises weighty returns, too, proof that Bardem's committed pragmatism has served him well: the family name is secure.

KEVIN HARLEY

## DIRECTORS' CHOICE

Praised for his 'masculine fragility' by John Malkovich, Bardem magnetised directors with his physicality and willingness to be challenged. Alejandro Amenábar cast him as a quadriplegic man in *The Sea Inside* (2004). Films for Woody Allen (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, 2008), Alejandro González Iñárritu (*Biutiful*, 2010), Terrence Malick (*To the Wonder*, 2012) and Ridley Scott (*The Counsellor*, 2013) also supported Francis Ford Coppola's claim: that Bardem might be the heir to Pacino, Nicholson and De Niro.

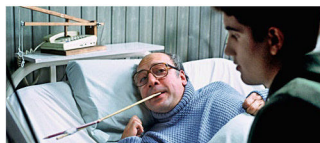
## KEY MOVIES



### BEFORE NIGHT FALLS 2000

★★★★★

First English-language role? Nailed. Bardem shows sensuality, intellect and dignity as defiant Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas, earning his first Oscar nom.



### THE SEA INSIDE 2004

★★★★★

Bed-bound and aged up, Bardem vividly suggests a restrained virility as the quadriplegic Ramón Sampedro in Amenábar's euthanasia drama.



### NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN 2007

★★★★★

'Call it...' Bardem imbued psycho-killer Anton Chigurh with a calmly relentless quality: his still stare and hair alike yield nothing.



### SKYFALL 2012

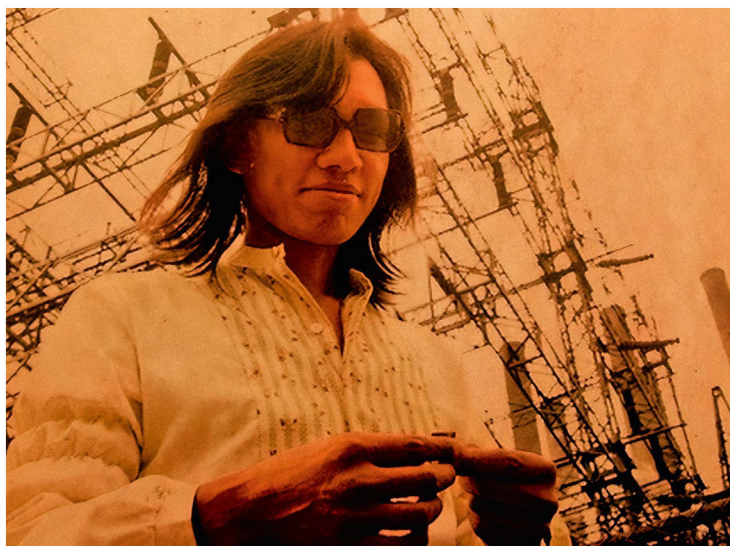
★★★★★

With his deliciously devilish turn as slippery, sociopathic peacock Raoul Silva, Bardem manages to make Bond villainy something new: unpredictable.



# DOCUMENTARIES

Test your know-how of non-fiction flicks...



## EASY

- 1 Which big-name director's documentary credits include *4 Little Girls* and *The Original Kings of Comedy*?
- 2 Which 2009 posthumous musical portrait is currently the highest-grossing doc of all time?
- 3 *You Cannot Kill David Arquette* sees the actor attempting a comeback in which sport?
- 4 In which year did the *Rumble in the Jungle* boxing bout take place, as seen in *When We Were Kings*? a) 1965 b) 1974 c) 1980
- 5 To date, how many feature documentaries has James Cameron directed?

## MEDIUM

- 1 Michael Moore's 1989 debut *Roger & Me* is centred on which US city?
- 2 In which year did the Oscars first include the Best Documentary category? a) 1932 b) 1940 c) 1942 d) 1950
- 3 *Man on Wire*'s Philippe Petit was later played by which actor in a 2015 narrative film?
- 4 Who narrated 2007 docu-parody *Farce of the Penguins*?
- 5 *Electric Boogaloo is The Wild, Untold Story of...* which film-production outfit?

## HARD

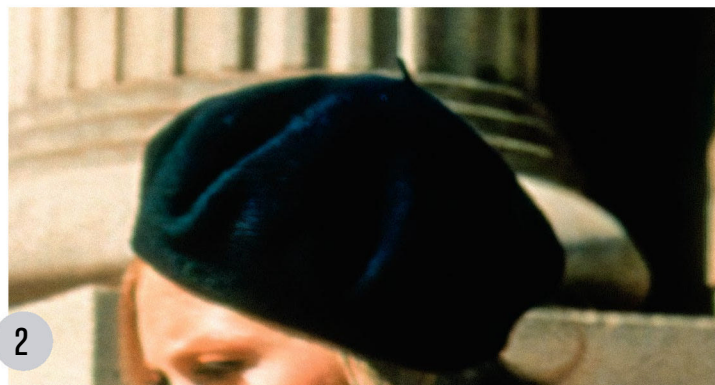
- 1 To date, Michael Moore has made one narrative feature... Name it.
- 2 Complete the *Grizzly Man* tagline: 'In nature, there are \_\_\_\_'
- 3 What's missing from this list? *Navalny*, *All That Breathes*, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, *Fire of Love*
- 4 What's the full name of the elusive musical subject of *Searching for Sugar Man*?
- 5 Name the sports featured in these docs: a) *Fire in Babylon* b) *Murderball* c) *Riding Giants*

ANSWERS: EASY - 1. SPIKE LEE 2. MICHAEL JACKSON'S THIS IS IT 3. WRESTLING 4. B) 1974 5. TWO - GHOSTS OF THE ABYSS, ALIENS OF THE DEEP MEDIUM - 1. FLINT, MICHIGAN 2. C) 1942 3. JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT 4. SAMUEL L. JACKSON 5. CANNON FILMS HARD - 1. GANADIAN BACON 2. BOUNDARIES 3. A HOUSE MADE OF SPLINTERS (THIS YEAR'S BEST DOC NOMINEES AT THE ACADEMY AWARDS) 4. SIXTO RODRIGUEZ 5. A) CRICKET 6) WHEELCHAIR RUGBY 7) C) SURFING



# NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight hat scenes?



ANSWERS: 1. HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE 2. BONNIE AND CLYDE 3. THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY 4. GOLDINGER 5. THE PRESTIGE 6. WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY 7. MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO 8. INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE



# Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.



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## ★ STAR LETTER

I'm sure Herodotus, the father of history, would be pleased to hear that there is a new Napoleon movie in the pipeline. For a few years it feels like there has been a lack of films about great historical figures or events. We need more classics like *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Elizabeth*, *Schindler's List*, *Lincoln*, *Spartacus*, *The Queen*, *Gandhi*, *Cleopatra*, etc. The importance of these films should never be underestimated; we can learn from the past lessons to help us face the challenges of the future. As Almásy says in *The English Patient*, '[Herodotus] writes about a wind, the simoon, which a nation thought was so evil they declared war on it and marched out against it. In full battle dress. Their swords raised.' Let's not make these same mistakes again.

DAVEY W, VIA EMAIL



Indeed. Let's turn swords into ploughshares, and then flog those to buy cinema tickets. Mind you, TF knows all too well the evils of wind thanks to some of the smaller, stuffier screening rooms... Davey and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Plane*, available now on digital, 4K UHD, Blu-ray and DVD via Lionsgate UK. Didn't send an address? Email it! Or brace for disappointment!

## HOLLYWOOD OR RUST

We've had dinosaurs and knights in the *Transformers* movies, soon to be joined by beasts. But I think the franchise's next transformation is right under our noses... Yep, you guessed it: Hollywood mode. This stuff writes itself. Aston Martin DB5 transforms into 'Bot, James Bot'. New York taxicab transforms into Mohi-con: 'You talkin' to me, Megatron?' *Thelma & Louise*'s 66 Ford Thunderbird morphs into Cliffjumper:



**BEN EVANS**  
[ON *KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON* RUNNING FOUR HOURS]  
**'Scorsese could knock out a 10-hour movie and I'd be there!!!'**

'Let's keep goin'!' And I've got to shoehorn in this one: Model T Ford transforms into Stanlaurel Prime, who is 'another fine Optimess'.

JACKY H, VIA EMAIL

Excellent pun-manship, Jacky. Be sure to read our feature on *Rise of the Beasts* (starting on p74), which puts to rest any rumours the movie is a team-up between furry X-Men, miserable Disney princes, Idris-hunting lions and Speedo-sporting retired safe-breakers.

## BITING BACK

Re: 25 Greatest Vampires of All Time [TF 335]. Much as I applauded the diversity of your choices, I was dismayed by some of the results. Gary Oldman's definitive turn as Dracula, in the most definitive adaptation to date, only 14th?

No Leslie Nielsen or George Hamilton in their comedic takes on the Count? And whither Jack Palance, who also played Stoker's archvillain? To use vampiric parlance, that sucks. Perhaps next time a longer list, so that some of these suggestions may actually 'count' (see what I did there?).

SEAN ALEXANDER, HOLYHEAD

...your list doesn't make space either for Jan Valek from John Carpenter's *Vampires*, played by none other than Thomas Ian Griffith - also known as Terry Silver, the baddie from *The Karate Kid Part III* and the excellent TV show *Cobra Kai*. A further glaring omission is your cover star Nic Cage as Peter Loew in *Vampire's Kiss*. Fangs a lot!

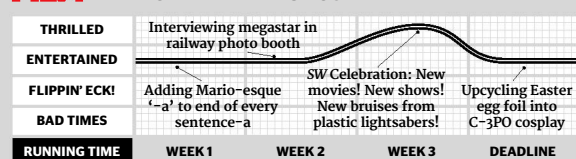
KEVIN STANLEY, LINCOLNSHIRE

## WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Interviews with Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Anya Taylor-Joy, Nicholas Hoult and the directors of *Dungeons & Dragons*; the film news from the future we'd like to see; plus reviews and more - every week!



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# OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE TOTAL FILM OFFICE THIS MONTH...

'My biggest regret? When they cut the phrase "butt-naked Penguin" \* **'I never got the Naked Gun joke when younger. I thought it was funny to have a stuffed beaver in the attic'**



@Markman85

[ON JOKER 2]

**'By the time Batman becomes Batman in this universe, Joker and Harley are going to be that old couple you see in a social club not looking at each other, just the bubbles in their drinks as the music plays.'**

We did give you a lot of Cage in the *Renfield* feature, so that is a bit of a Loew blow. But sound alt-choices; the tooth of the matter is the rest of the mag would've been squeezed down to caption size if we'd honoured every vein-bothering Tom, Dick and Gary.

## FOUR SLAY

Just seen *John Wick: Chapter 4*, surely the best fourquel ever made, hands down! You can sleep through *Omen IV: The Awakening*, spray shark repellent at *Jaws: The Revenge*, laugh at the rubber nipples in *Batman & Robin*, avoid the white-dogs'-muck-looking hybrid thing at the end of *Alien: Resurrection*... All shonky number fours in their respective series. Honestly, can anyone out there in TF Land think of a better fourth movie from sequel-loving Hollywood? All hail Keanu Reeves, the undisputed king of the quadrilogy!

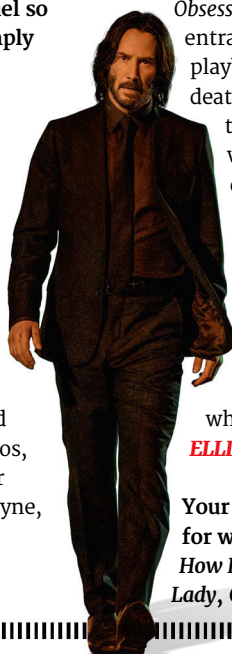
PHIL SLOAN, BEXLEY

Surely you can't be forgetting *Star Wars: A New Hope*? A fourquel so superior, George Lucas simply had to make it first.

## DC CHANGE

After reading last month's feature on the new Gunn/Safran DC Studios rollout, I started to feel pumped, mind-blown, definitely feverish and possibly even slightly aroused by their new and expanded comic-book cosmos. It's time to discover new characters and stories: Creature Commandos, Doctor Phosphorus, Booster Gold, Lanterns, Damian Wayne, Swamp Thing... Defo feels like the second Big Bang!

TONY MANN, VIA EMAIL



We're excited for the fresh start too, while hoping that Gunn keeps some things old-school, like a mixtape soundtrack. Basically, if there's no Black Lace needle drop ('Comb your hair... Wave your hands... Superman!') we're exiting the cinema faster than a speeding bullet.

## BLOOD SIRK

At my mum's recently, I started watching a film called *Magnificent Obsession* and was immediately entranced. Rock Hudson's rich playboy inadvertently causes the death of a beloved doctor; he tries to make amends to the doc's widow (Jane Wyman) and of course falls for her. Fantastic. However, I bet if the film was remade today it would be a dark, revenge-driven action thriller, with a high body count and Wyman's character having a very particular set of skills! I think I know which version I prefer...

ELLIE, VIA EMAIL

Your remake could spark a vogue for weaponising the classics: *How Red Was My Valley*, *My Warfare Lady*, *Gone With the Wick*...

**YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO** Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)





# 60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA**

## FADE IN:

### INT. ANT-HOME

PAUL RUDD discovers that his now-18-year-old daughter KATHRYN NEWTON is somehow both a troublemaking law-breaker and a scientific genius.

### MICHAEL DOUGLAS

Remember the impossible Quantum Realm where my wife was trapped for 30 years? Kathryn Newton has just built something in our basement that can instantly transport us there.

The machine suddenly switches on and they are all instantly transported there.

### MICHELLE PFEIFFER

Well, this is just great.

### EXT. QUANTUM REALM

The group is separated. PAUL RUDD and KATHRYN NEWTON immediately meet a group of alien-type people living in the Quantum Realm that no one has ever mentioned before.

### KATHRYN NEWTON

Dad! Drink the ooze! Then everything will make sense.

He does and then everyone speaks English. He is introduced to a warrior queen, a sarcastic telepath, a polite blob obsessed with holes and a guy with a laser cannon for a head.

### PAUL RUDD

I don't think it worked?

### EXT. QUANTUM REALM CANTINA

MICHELLE PFEIFFER takes MICHAEL DOUGLAS and EVANGELINE LILLY to an alien bar to meet LORD BILL MURRAY.

### LORD BILL MURRAY

You would think, with everything else going on, my presence in this film wouldn't be one of the weirdest things in it, and yet here I am.

### MICHELLE PFEIFFER

Yes, well, we need help and, thanks to our



confusing and unexplained friendship, you're the only person I can trust.

He betrays her. They shoot their way out of the bar and steal his ship. Meanwhile, the villain from the first film returns as a joke guaranteed to upset fans.

### COREY STOLL

A-ha! I have turned into a heavily armed, but badly CGI-ed, killing machine! But for some reason I will mostly be just comic relief.

### PAUL RUDD

Riiiiight. Is anyone in this film actually going to be a serious character?

### FLASHBACK

#### EXT. QUANTUM REALM

MICHELLE PFEIFFER helps a stranded JONATHAN MAJORS to repair his fancy chair machine. Then she discovers that he's planning to use it to destroy entire worlds.

### JONATHAN MAJORS

Don't you see? I can still help you. I can travel throughout time and space in this fancy chair, which means I can return you to a point before you were trapped here.

### MICHELLE PFEIFFER

I'll be honest, I don't really understand how that works. Or who you are. Or what you're trying to do.

She soon betrays him. Back in the present day, PAUL RUDD is forced to help JONATHAN MAJORS. He jumps into a place where he multiplies into thousands and thousands of versions of himself.

### PAUL RUDD

Well, this is a fun, if completely nonsensical and ultimately unnecessary set-piece.

### ALL THE OTHER PAUL RUDDS

Yep. None of us understand why this is happening.

### EXT. QUANTUM REALM

They all fight. JONATHAN MAJORS' army fights everyone. COREY STOLL fights KATHRYN NEWTON. Even MICHAEL DOUGLAS turns up with some fighting ants. Eventually 'S.T.O.L.L.O.K.' dies.

### COREY STOLL

I killed Jonathan Majors! At least I died doing the right thing, even if nothing I have done in this film feels in keeping with my character in the first film.

They all start to return home but JONATHAN MAJORS returns. PAUL RUDD fights him and eventually kills him properly, but he is left trapped in the Quantum Realm.

### KATHRYN NEWTON

Don't worry, Dad! My machine means I am able to come and rescue you. Remember when the Quantum Realm was supposedly difficult to navigate?

### EXT. COUNCIL OF JONATHANS

Thousands of different versions of JONATHAN MAJORS all vow revenge. Then TOM HIDDLESTON meets a different version of him in the early 1900s.

### PAUL RUDD

Has anyone got any more ooze? I'm more confused than ever...

### FIN

### NEXT ISSUE: SCREAM VI

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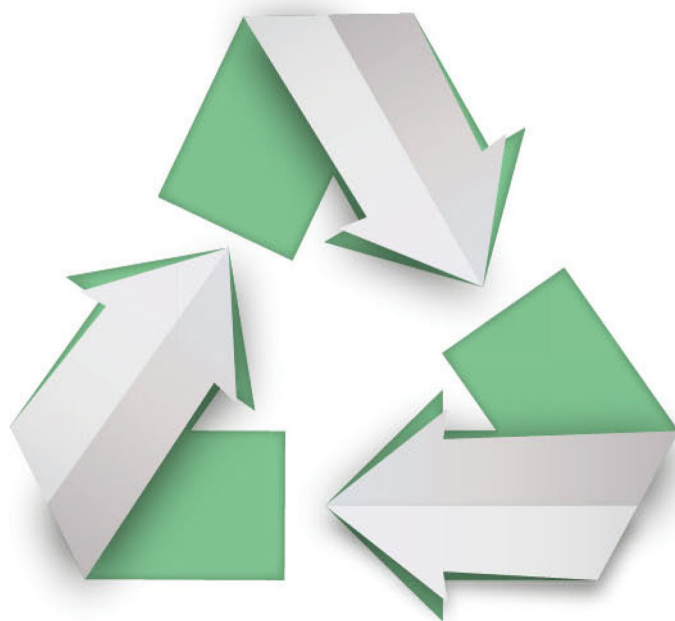
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